

Soldiers at War

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Summary: Humanity had been fighting them for nearly thirty years. And just when it looked like things were just about over for us they left. Now it is up to the crew of the UNSC Texas Ranger to find out where the Covenant has gone and why.

1. Prologue

****Prologue.****

A soldier in full body armor walked through a hallway of drab colored metal and what appeared to be pods with small windows set in them. A closer inspection would reveal that these pods held people who seemed to be in some sort of sleep. The soldier continued his walk, lost deep in thought as he considered the state of things and how they had come to be.

Everything was quiet and calm. The crew and my team are in their stasis pods. All nonessential systems have been powered down and now that the crew is in cryo that means life support as well. I was the last one to go in to stasis and therefore my job to make one last check on everything to make sure there were no problems.

We had no idea how long we will be in cryo and with no one up to monitor things I couldn't afford to overlook anything.

I sighed as I walked down the empty hallways. My footsteps echoed in the empty hallway, or they would have if the air in this section hadn't been vented. This was not how this was supposed to end. I guess there are worse fates than drifting through space with a fried FTL drive, but after all we had gone through to save the UNSC.

The crew deserved a chance to go home and be with their families.

I stopped and looked out into space through a breach in the ship's hull, that the engineers had been unable to seal. I turned round and viewed the scorched bulkhead opposite the breach. I looked at the

hole one more time and wondered if anyone had been in this hall when it had happened. I then opened the hatch that led to the next section and continued on.

Everyone aboard had been through a lot and so had the ship, as an eerie groan that had just occurred gave evidence too. She had served us well, though we took her into hell she brought us back every time, and she would again.

When we got home a friendly dry-dock would be waiting for her.

"Find everything in order Sir?" The ships AI asked as I entered the bridge and approached the command char and looked out the bridge view screen at the stars.

"Everything seems to be alright, at least for now." I replied heavily at the afterthought. "Have you completed your analysis of the ships systems?"

"Yes." She replied, her color changing briefly. "All non-essential systems have been powered down. Main reactors are in standby mode, as are all secondary reactors save one."

"Good. How is the crew?"

"Checking." it was a few seconds before the AI replied. "All stasis pods are functioning well within safety parameters."

"Very well then I guess it's time for me to initiate your hibernate mode."

"Yes but if anything should happen he can't handle, Jarvis has been instructed to wake me."

"What's the estimated time we can stay out here?"

"Baring no mechanical failure the crew can remain in stasis for approximately two hundred and fifty years before reactor shut down."

"And you?"

"I can remain in hibernation for an estimated time of thirty years before I begin to degrade. However this system of AI storage has only been tested once before."

"Well let's hope we aren't out here that long. Good night Rachel." I said in reply before initiating the AI's hibernation mode.

"Good night Sir." I only nodded, feeling quite weary myself and is must have shown as I got a small smile before she went into hibernation mode.

When I got to the cryo bay where my pod was located I got in, thankful the new pods didn't freeze burn you as easily as the old ones, and Jarvis, the ships dumb AI, activated it and I joint the rest of the crew in slumber.

How did we end up in this situation? You might ask. Well that is a long story, but it looks like I have lots of time on my hands. And

since I have nothing better to do with my time I would tell you, however as I am about to fall into cryo-sleep. You will have to discover it on your own. There is a console in the center of the room I am sure you can find it as it is the only one on right now. There you will find that I have compiled all the data concerning the events that led up to now. Including my own personal log, but I warn youâ€¦ This tail is not for the faint of heart.

****UNSC Dumb AI Jarvis Cereal number JTN-0317-2.****

I have been instructed by Spartan-B228 to allow you full access to the ships records, and to answer any questions you might have.

You are currently adored the UNSC ship Texas Ranger a refit Halcyon-class light cruiser. She was commissioned in 2510 decommissioned in 2521 and re-commissioned in 2527 as a test bed for experimental technology, she was then refit in 2552 for a mission into Covenant controlled space.

2. Chapter 01

****Chapter 01.****

****September 05th 2552.****

****Epsilon Eridani Star System, Planet Reach, ONI Headquarters.****

The ONI officers looked up at the holographic star map put together by the AI CTN-0452-9 Cortana. The Naval officers in the room couldn't help but shake their heads at how something like this had been missed by ONI. Then again, under their current commander, ONI was not performing as well as they should have. In fact on something's it had dropped the ball and walked away.

"You're telling me Cortana," Admiral Whitcomb turned to the AI, his face bordering on purple from the building rage with in him, "That we've had this map for some time and ONI only NOW gets around to realizing the importance of those SEEMINGLY innocent rocks that the Covenant decided a defeat was worth trying to get THEM!"

"Yes sir, although I might point out that it could have been a-"

"Quiet!" the Admiral barked, surprising everyone, "I'm well aware, but I will NOT have that in my command."

The Reach LOCOM CINC turned to the Army Colonel who was now sweating crates of bullets. The man had done a lot to sabotage Dr. Catherine E. Halsey, but even this kind of gross incompetence was outside his area. In truth, he had done nothing, for once, to sabotage a report, but unfortunately for him, the real culprit was on her ship, far away and nice and safe.

The admiral drew himself up to his full height and his tone held the strength of their best battle plate for their capitals as he spoke, "I want all your Spartan personnel under the command of Captain Sierra-One-One-Seven and complete control of the projects under Halsey YESTERDAY! You two have been at each other's throats long enough and it has cost us too much.

"Yes sir admiral!" he was getting off light, very light, his career may end, but at least he had his head.

"Get me Earth HIGHCOM and send a squadron to find and detain the Point of No Return and her entire crew and embarked personnel!"

"At once," another admiral said as she turned to go and give the orders. The fact that the Point of No Return was not spoken as an UNSC ship spoke volumes for Admiral Parangosky's future in the service.

"Status on the Covenant we've spotted?" he asked next, he needed to know if he could send ships to investigate.

"They've pulled back to the old 2543 positions sir," an ONI Intelligence officer who belonged to the Prowler Corps spoke, "They appear to be made up of several formations, including those that hit Reach as their center balance."

The admiral nodded, he was soon joined Captain Jacob Keyes. The two men studied what the ONI spook was showing them on a holo-map. The positions would allow them to advance and make contact with isolated garrisons and colonies and even move some refugees home. Yet the Covenant formation was clearly a rear guard action, but the question was why?

"Any idea of what they're up to?" Keyes asked. The Spook shrugged.

"Well that's the billion credit question isn't it. We managed to captor two Field Marshals they aren't saying much. But from observing them I don't think they know what happened either."

"That answer gives me little comfort," Ackerson said, looking critically at the map, "A rear guard and a strong one when you think about it, especially since I think I can recognize some of these movements..." the man looked in deep thought. "Admiral if you're going to send ships now's the time."

"Keys how long?"

"Give or take a week, two if you don't want me tipping my hand."

"Make it two. I will also send two destroyers and three frigates with you."

"Thank you Sir. Keyes then saluted and turned to go.

"Alright what's next?" Whitcomb asked tiredly as Keys left the room.

"Commander Carter-A259 is waiting to be debriefed sir." An aid told him.

"Very well send him in."

Moments later a man standing about six and a half feet tall dressed in blue and gray armor entered the room his face darkly tanned as if

he saw a lot of sun, he had light blue eyes and had a flattop haircut. The soldier walked up to Admiral Whitcomb and gave him a crisp salute.

"Good to see you Commander." Whitcomb said as he returned Carter's salute. "Alright let's get started. As you are no doubt are aware at 10:43 hours on August 15th the Covenant for no apparent reason retreated from Reach. We need to find out why."

"That is why you are here." Colonel Holland said making his presence known for the first time. "As you know the Covenant never retreats when they are winning and rarely when they are losing."

"We must find out why they retreated. The saying is if you know your enemy and know yourself you will be victorious. We know our selves, but one of the problems throughout this war has been that we know little to nothing of the Covenant. This thankfully has changed somewhat as of a few days ago. However there is much we still do not know. One of those things is why the Covenant left when they had the upper hand? Reports have been coming in that the Covenant has been pulling back on all fronts. It is almost as if something has scared them. So we are putting a team together to venture into Covenant space and find out what is going on. HIGHCOM has made this a top priority." Admiral Whitcomb informed the Commander.

"And you want my team on this?" Carter asked even though he already knew the answer.

"Yes." answered Admiral Rich the head of ONI section three who had been quiet until now. "In about five hours a Halcyon-class cruiser should be arriving from earth. The cruiser is the Texas Ranger."

"We have managed to get a replacement to fill the empty position in your team, here is his file." Colonel Holland said as he tossed the folder over to Noble One.

"Command has also decided to give you a AI team member." Admiral Rich said. He then picked up a briefcase from the floor and took out a data crystal chip. He then placed the chip in the room's holo projector. Instantly a small figure of a holographic woman appeared. She had a pleasant face, and looked to be in her early twenties, her hair was done up in a bun, and she was wearing a navy uniform.

"Good evening Noble One it is my pleasure to serve with you." said the woman.

"This is Rachel. She will be your team's personal AI carried by you Noble One." Admiral Rich said.

"And how am I supposed to carry an AI around with me Sir?" Noble One asked.

"I am sure you have noticed that your helmets have data ports in them. That is where you will place my chip. I will then interface with your armor's computers."

"And how will you assist my team?" asked Noble One.

"I can interface with any computer system, I can offer your team real time tactical analyses, I can hack covenant networks, I can also

monitor all communications picked up by your armors systems and keep you updated on what is accruing around you that you may not be aware of." Rachel informed Noble one.

"Satisfied Commander?" Admiral Rich asked.

"Yes Sir."

"Now when the Texas Ranger arrives you will report to captain Robert Foster. There will be a pelican waiting for you up top. Good luck and God speed." said Admiral Whitcomb.

"Thank you Sir." The Spartan said as he saluted before leaving the room.

Once Carter reached the surface he made his way to the waiting pelican and his fellow team mates.

"So who did Command give us as a replacement?" Jun asked as he seated himself next to Noble One in the pelican troop bay.

"Alfred-B228." Noble One answered as he looked at the folders.

"So he's from Beta Company, do either of you two know him?" Jun asked looking at Kat and Six.

"I knew Alfred a little; he was in the saber program with me. He kept to himself mostly, but he was a good pilot." Six said.

"Alfred's file has him, after the saber program working with a team of ODSF. Going behind Covenant lines to assess the status of colonies taken by the Covenant and destroying anything ONI didn't want the Covenant to find, that they had not been able to destroy in the initial evacuation. Then he was sent on a number of missions behind Covenant lines to locate and retrieve packages for ONI."

"So has command given us a new mission?" Six asked.

"Yes everything you need to know is on this." Carter held up a data pad and then handed it to Kat to upload to the rest of the team.

"So any word on the ship we will be using on this mission?" Kat asked after looking at the data. "I doubt ONI would be willing to let us have a prowler."

"Their sending a cruiser from Earth, the _Texas Ranger_." Carter said.

"I know that ship." Six spoke up with surprise. "I thought it was being used as a test ship for experimental technology."

"It was, but apparently after seeing the after action report for the Pillar of Autumn. Command ordered the Texas Ranger cleaned up and refit, so that she could be used on this mission. At least that's what the file says"

I was at Anchor 12 waiting for the rest of the team to arrive. I was eager to find out why I had been pulled from my current assignments and brought back to Reach. I was certain it had something to do with the Covenant's retreat from Reach, but what it was Command wanted was

still a mystery.

I quickly came to attention when Noble One stepped through the airlock followed by the rest of Noble team.

"At ease Lieutenant." Noble One said. "I have read your file, seems ONI was very pleased with your work." Noble One said as the rest of the team filed in.

"Nice to know you are appreciated." I replied.

"I am Carter, That's Kat Noble Two, Jun Noble three, Emile Noble four, and I believe you have met Noble Six."

"Your stepping it to some shoos that I and the team would rather not see filled, but the brass needs Noble up to full strength. And where we are going we are going to need every one we can get."

"Understood Sir."

3. Chapter 02

****Chapter 02.****

****October 08th 2552. Covenant Space.****

To simply say we were bored would have been a gross understatement. We were dying of boredom and it was not just us Spartans who were out of our minds with boredom, but the crew as well. Normally we would have gone into cryo, but because we had to be ready at a moment's notice that was out of the question.

We had spent just over a month in Covenant controlled space and not seen so much as a Covenant frigate. Even in systems where just weeks prior ONI had recorded major Covenant activity we found nothing. It was as if the Covenant had just packed up and left. So when the call to battle stations was sounded we were overjoyed to hear it.

"Sir we just picked up a Covenant ship on sensors." an Ensign at the sensors station informed the captain.

"Have they seen us?" Captain Foster asked.

"Very likely Captain their sensors have a longer range than ours."

"What class is it?" Foster asked eagerly.

"Hard to tell at this rang Sir, but from the readings I am getting probably a CCS class."

"Good, that means they won't likely runaway." Foster said with glee.

"Walker."

"Yes Captain." The ships AI, a man with a sort beard and dressed in 20th century American western style clothing, a long cote with a star pinned on it, and to complete the outfit he wore a stetson,

asked.

"Time to test out our new toys. Make sure everything is prepped I don't want to waste this opportunity. And Walker, tell the Spartans I want them ready to board that ship the moment its shields are down."

"Understood Captain."

****Spartan Armory.****

"Captain will likely want us to board that ship. So arm your selves appropriately." Carter said.

"That means a shotgun not a sniper." Emile told Jun as Jun began loading his beloved rifle.

"There are plenty of places a sniper can come in handy on that ship."

"Is that so?" Emile scoffed as he picked up a grenade launcher.

"Here" I said as I tossed Jun an M90. "This should do the trick if they get too close."

"What are you planning on using?" Kat asked as she examined an M6G.

"I have always enjoyed the Elites energy swords." I told her as I opened a crate and took out a pair of energy swords.

"Isn't that considered contraband?"

"If you do your job well ONI is usually willing to overlook a few things."

"Noble team, Captain wants you ready to board the Covenant ship the moment its shields are down." Walker informed us.

"Ok Walker we are on our way to the launch bay now." Noble One replied as he loaded his assault rifle.

"Walker what class of ship did we run in to?" Emile asked.

"A CCS class."

"Damn I would have preferred something a little smaller." Jun said.

"Oh come on the bigger the ship the more Covies we get to kill." Emile told him with enthusiasm.

"That also means more Covenant to shoot at us." I said.

By the time we reached the launch bay and had our booster frames ready the Texas had fired one MAC round. A moment later we received the green light to launch.

Most Spartans disliked space combat. That I believe is because most

have not had the opportunity to participate in it. Most have only been able to watch as the ships around them are destroyed. We feel helpless unable to defend ourselves, unable to influence the course of the battle. But when a Spartan is given a fighter and allowed to participate in the battle he or she finds themselves in a world ideally suited to a Spartan. The Spartans quick reaction times, our ability to withstand more G's than an ordinary human, our remarkable eyesight, our ability to think fast and Spartan time makes us the most dangerous fighter pilots alive.

As we left the Texas's ventral launch bay she fired another MAC round. The Covenant cruiser's shields glowed as they tried to hold back the round. They succeeded, but from the sparking around the ship, we could tell they had been depleted in doing so.

One of the disadvantages the UNSC had had throughout the war was that our ships were usually destroyed before they could inflict enough damage to a Covenant ship to destroy it. Thankfully this was beginning to change, with new MAC gun technology that allowed a MAC to fire more times on a single charge and recharge faster than they had been able to previously. This meant that a cruiser could now bring down it's Covenant counterparts shields and still have one shot left to cripple or destroy it.

As we began to pull away from the Texas the Covenant Cruiser fired a plasma torpedo. As it sped toward the Texas, one of the eight sixteen inch dual mounted turrets opened fire. These sixteen inch guns were a new addition to the ships normal armament and were said to be powerful enough to penetrate the hull of a Covenant cruiser if its shields were down. However that's not what it was being used for at the moment. Right now it was being used to shoot down the incoming torpedo. Normally this would do nothing to impede the progress of a plasma torpedo; however the scientist on Earth had developed a new type of ammo. The new round was a sort of EMP flak round. The round would detonate just before impact with its target, hitting it with shrapnel, and EMP. The theory behind this new ammo was that the EMP would destabilize the magnetic field encasing the plasma of a torpedo, and allow it to dissipate harmlessly in space. And the reason for using the much larger caliber over the normal fifty millimeter and five inch point-defense guns was the scientist were worried they would not be able to create a big enough EMP blast to dissipate the torpedo.

We watched the torpedo get hit by EMP blast and dissipate harmlessly into space. Finally we had a viable defense against Covenant torpedoes.

Texas answered the Battlecruiser's torpedo with a volley of archer missiles. This was not really meant to damage the cruiser, but to give us a sort of smoke screen. We would follow behind them as close as we dared and once we entered within range of the Covenant point defense lasers hope that there would be enough missiles to keep them busy until we got close enough to the ship that they could no longer effectively target us.

The last missiles were destroyed just as we had lined up with the cruisers port hanger bay. We all fired our gauss cannons at the sides of the door, three on one side, three on the other in order to knock out the shield projectors so that we could enter the ship. After that we launched every missile pod we had into the hanger and

flew in guns blazing. When the smoke had cleared there wasn't a living Covenant left in that hanger.

"Alright we need to move before this ship can do any real damage to the Texas." Noble One said after we had all dismounted from our booster frames. Just then the cruiser shook.

"What was that?" Jun asked.

"That was the Texas Ranger's deck guns. It would seem captain Foster is attempting to knockout the plasma launchers." Rachel explained.

"We don't have time to worry about that right now." Carter barked. "Kat and Jun get down to engineering and seal it off. Emile and Alfred I want you two to salvage as much Covenant tech as you can if you can find a way to get it off this ship do it. Also If you come across any engineers bring them along, ONI has marked them as a tier one asset. Six your with me will head to the bridge and see what Rachel can find out. Understood?"

"Yes Sir." We all answered in unison.

Fifteen minutes later Covenant cruiser's bridge.

The two members of Noble team entered the bridge. The shipmaster sat in his command char located in the center of the bridge. And as they entered he turned his char to face them while the six minor Elites and twelve Grunts. Who had obviously been waiting for them, raised their weapons.

"I knew it was a mistake to pull out of this front, before we had crushed you wretched humans." The Shipmaster a very large but, old looking Elite in gold armor growled as he rose slowly from his char.

The Six and Carter were a little taken aback, by the fact that an Elite would take the time to talk to them. However they did not fail to notes that the other Elites in the room looked much younger than their commander and several were visually shaking.

"I have heard many tales about you Daemons and your abilities, today we will see if that is true." The Shipmaster said drawing his sword.

Carter shook his head. He knew something was off the first time he had engaged resistant's after boarding this ship. The crew was green, which meant this ship was more than likely a training vessel, but what was it doing here? He didn't have time to continue with this train of thought; he and Six had a bridge to clear.

The Elite Shipmaster began to charge, but was forced to brake off when Carter stuck a Miner Elite with a plasma grenade. The Doomed Elite vainly tried to remove the grenade as his comrade's dove for cover, seconds later the grenade detonated. Several Elites didn't get to cover in time and their shields were depleted in the explosion. Within seconds they each received a shaped lump of metal to the head. Four Grunts were also caught in the blast and sent flying across the room.

However the remaining Elites quickly retaliated with their own plasma grenades, forcing the two Spartans to take cover. Then two Elite miners charged them. However Carter and Six quickly retaliated. Carter emerged from cover and fired his shotgun. One of the Elite caught the blast right in the face at pointblank turning it to jelly. Six managed to bring down the other's shields and put a neat hole through his cranium. Six of the remaining Grunts tried to use their plasma grenades; however before they could throw them they became lifeless lumps on the floor. The explosion from the dropped grenades vaporized their bodies, killed the remaining Grunts, destroyed servile bridge consoles, and killed an Elite. Carter finished the last Elite miner a second latter.

Enraged the Shipmaster charged Noble Six, but before he could stab him with his sword. Six sidestepped him, grabbed his arm, wrenched it up so violently that he likely dislocated it, and then throw him against the wall. The Shipmaster growled at Six, Six answered him with a magnum round to the skull.

"Alright Rachel time for you to go to work." Carter said as he removed the AI's chip from his helmet and inserted it into the ships command uplink. Rachel's Avatar then appeared on the holo emitter on the arm of the command char.

"Wow this is roomy, more so than I had expected."

"Anything of interest Rachel?" Six asked.

"You have no idea. It appears the Covenant have just updated the star map using one they captured from a human ship."

"What! They have our star map?" Carter asked a hint of worry in his voice.

"No not our star map. We captured their original map after the battle at Reach when we were going throw one of the ships we knocked out. At that time the Covenant had yet to leave the Orion arm. Now they have a map that spans nearly the entire galaxy. And the ship they captured doesn't match any ship in the UNSC, however now is not the time to go into this. I suggest we blow this tub and get the hell out of here."

"I am with you on that one Rachel." The Commander said eagerly.

"Kat how are things coming?" Noble One asked over the com.

"We have just finished clearing Engineering, and are sealing the doors now. Once you set the reactor to overload there will be no stopping it." Kat informed him.

"Good, we have got what we came for. When you are done meet us in the hanger."

"Will do Sir."

****Mean Wile Ships Hanger.****

"I can't believe the split lips didn't have better security here." Emile said as he lifted a crate of plasma grenades.

"I think there to busy trying to keep the others from blowing the ship." I replied.

"That's probably true." Emile chuckled. "But I would have liked a little more challenge."

I shook my head. "I think I can live without challenges while I am carrying a crate of grenades." I said as I handed a crate of incendiary grenades to an engineer.

I have to admit when I heard command had designated the covenant engineers as tier one assets I was not as surprised as some. I had read the reports and had observed them myself on a number of missions. Unlike the other Covenant species the engineers did not participate in combat. Marines often left engineers alone because they never posed any threat unless they had been equipped with a shield projector. Even then marines would not always kill them the resin being that the engineers would in some cases project a shield around the marines. However we had never actually managed to capture any of them. Why I am not sure, but now we had about twenty of them helping us lode the phantoms we had acquired.

"I don't like this." Emile said angrily as an engineer floated past him.

"I know you would like to just shoot them or shove them out an air lock and watch them burst, but orders are orders. And you have to admit they are helpful."

Emile picked up a crate of plasma repeaters and began caring them to a phantom. "Doesn't mean I have to like It." he growled.

"Emile, Alfred, We have the data. I hope you have made good use of your time."

"Yes Sir." I replied. "We just have to finish packing the phantoms we acquired and then we are good to go."

"You better hurry we will be there soon."

"Understood Sir."

****Texas Ranger's War Room.****

"My brothers it is with a sad heart that I inform you the defilers are not as beaten as we believed them to be. We have just learned that the vermin we have been cleansing from this galaxy are, but a dull tip of a larger spear. The humans we have been facing are a small tribe that the rest of their kind has cast off. The human presences spans even further than we previously believed possible. They have enslaved other races and have hid the truth of the great journey from them. This will not be tolerated, and the fowl humans will be punished."

"Well that is interesting and disturbing." Captain Foster said after seeing the holo vid. "However this could work to our advantage, as long as we don't do anything to make the Covenant consider us a threat. We should have some time to rebuild the fleet and implement the new tech being developed."

"I don't understand how there could be more humans out there." Jun said as he leaned on the edge of the holo table.

"We could speculate on it all we wanted to, but the only way we would find out is if we go meet them." Carter said.

"And that is exactly what we are going to do." Foster told us.

"Sir?" Carter asked pulsed.

"Son we can't just sit on our ass and do nothing. At the very least we can gather Intel on these new aliens. Determine what sort of threat they pose, if any. And find out if an alliance with the other humans out there is possible."

"Rachel."

"Yes Sir?"

"Prep one of the slipspace probes. Send HIGHCOM all the data that we recovered from the Covenant ship, as well as the after action report, and analyses of new weapons systems. Also include a message informing them of my decision to continue on into the new region of space the Covenant have uncovered. To determine what is happening there. And send the coordinates to the closest system to us, located on this outer rim. Tell them if they want to send us a message to send the probe there."

"Aye Aye Sir." Rachel replied. "Sir I have just finished going through the Shipmasters communication logs, and Mission logs. I may have found two things of interest."

"Well let's hear it." The captain said crossing his arms and leaning back a bit.

"First the ship we intercepted picked up a distress signal twenty-six hours ago and were attempting to track down its origin when we showed up."

"I assume this distress signal was from an UNSC ship."

"Yes Captain. I have attempted to pick up the signal myself but we seem to be out of range. However the Covenant had the signal recorded and were attempting to decode it. Therefore I was able to decipher the message and discovered it came from the Spirit of Fire."

"_Spirit of Fire_ If memory serves me correctly she went missing about twenty years ago."

"Yes Sir the _Spirit of Fire_ went missing after the battle of Arcadia. Captain Cutter was forced to chase after a covenant destroyer when Professor Anders was captured. The ship and her crew were never heard from again."

"Do you have any idea where the Spirit is now?" "No Sir I am however able to give you a general area with a circumference of about ten light years of where she might be. If we had another ship with us I would be able to triangulate her position and give you a more precise

location."

"Never mined Rachel We do not have time to go looking for the Spirit right now any way. Include your findings in the report to Command. I am sure they can spar a few ships to bring her home. What was the other thing you mentioned?"

Rachel then brought up the holo map of the galaxy and highlighted a system. "It seems that the former Shipmaster had a friend in the Covenant high command. Apparently the last time they talked this friend told him about an attack that was going to take place here." Rachel said pointing to the highlighted system.

"Walker." Captain Foster called the sips AI.

"Yes Sir."

"Set a course for that system. Let's see what the Covenant is up to."

4. Chapter 03

****Chapter 0****3****.****

****UNSC Dumb AI Jarvis Cereal number JTN-0317-2.****

"_The fallowing is a battle report retrieved by ONI._"

****Gerrenthum battle report 4/28/3650****

On 4/20/3650 at 07:43 hours. We received word that the Republic world Gerrenthum was under attack by an unknown force of five hundred ships. After meeting with the Chancellor Master Yoda ordered the twelfth and thirteenth fleets to rendezvous with the fifth fleet at Coruscant.

****Note, The twelfth and thirteenth fleets were previously engaged in a three week training exercise, of which two weeks remained when they were ordered to Coruscant.****

After rendezvousing at Coruscant the fleet left for Gerrenthum. At 08:00 hours on 4/25/3650 the fleet arrived at the Gerrenthum system. The task force found a force of about four hundred ships orbiting around Gerrenthum some of witch were bombarding the planets. Master Yoda attempted to hail the unknown fleet, in response the unknown fleet sent a message to every ship in our fleet. This message had been recorded here.

_We are the Covenant and we are the instruments of the gods. The humans are a blight upon the galaxy, and it is the will of the gods that they be destroyed. All of you that have allied yourselves with the humans you do not need to die surrender and you will be spared.

—

Five minutes after sending this message the Covenant fleet moved to engage our forces.

****Note. Current known Covenant ships range from around five hundred to three thousand meters. They typically have a smooth and curved**

hull design almost resembling a large sea creature and are colored purple. The Covenant also employ energy shielding and most of their weapons appear to be plasma and particle based.**

Our forces were caught off guard when the Covenant halted their advance and opened fire on them with a form of guided plasma projectile outside their own effective weapons range. This left the task force at disadvantage as they were forced to close the range while under fire. Each one of our lead ships was struck by 3 to 4 of the plasma projectiles from the first volley, nearly depleting their shields. The Covenant fired another volley the lead ships again took the brunt of the attack. However with their shields at varying degrees of depletion, a number of them took heavy damage and some were destroyed or rendered inoperable.

At this time our ships returned fire with concussion missiles and proton torpedoes. The Covenant fleet took no apparent action to avoid the barrage of missiles headed for them. The reason became evident when they began swatting our missiles and torpedoes out of existence was a very efficient point defense system. The handful of projectiles that did make it through impacted harmlessly on a silvery energy shield.

Just after this the four largest Covenant ships opened fire with a powerful beam weapon. This new weapon is capable of dropping a Venator's shields within seconds and not much longer to core the vessel from stem to stern.

In an attempt to lessen the effect of the Covenant's fire Mastery Yoda split the fleet into four groups and gave each the objective of taking out one dreadnought. At this time our fighter wings and assault ships began their attack on the Covenant fleet. The fighters and assault ships appear to have drawn some of the Covenant's fire away from our capital ships allowing them to close in with fewer losses. However a large number of assault ships and fighters were destroyed by Covenant torpedoes and point defense guns during their approach. Once they reached the enemy fleet the Covenant point defense was drastically reduced. The assault ships made their attack runs and broke off to rejoin the rest of the fleets the fighters meanwhile stayed and harassed the enemy.

Note. Our fighters were engaged by two types of enemy fighters. The first was a larger teardrop shaped fighter and they proved to be very fast, agile, resilient, and possessed potent weapons, we lost many good pilots to them. The second was an almost insect looking craft. It was much smaller, possessed less potent weapons, and was not equipped with shields like its larger counterpart, its only strength was its agility and high speed. These proved to be of little threat unless they were in very large numbers.

Once the fleet entered weapons range the four battle groups set about the task of taking out the dreadnoughts. Battle group Charlie after about half an hour broke through to their target and shortly after destroyed it. It took battle group Alpha over an hour to take out their target. Battle group Delta only managed to inflict moderate damage to their target after nearly two hours of fighting. Battle group Bravo however was unable to reach its target even with reinforcements from Alpha and Delta.

After nearly seven hours of constant fighting master Yoda ordered the

fleet to disengage. The fleet had taken heavy casualties, nearly 1/3ths of its original strength had been destroyed or disabled. Dering the engagement we believe we managed to destroy or disable two-hundred Covenant vessels.

An infiltration team sent to the plan surface reported that there was nothing left, out of the inhabitants rated to be in the billions there were no known survivors. With no one left on the planet the objective to retake Gerrenthum became pointless. Lacking any advantage over the Covenant Master Yoda ordered the fleet to withdraw from the system.

UNSC Dumb AI Jarvis Cereal number JTN-0317-2.

"_The fallowing is a holo recording of a meeting that took place on October 2__nd__ 2552. The recording was retrieved my ONI."_

Playback Chancellor's office time stamp 4/28/3650 09:00 hours.

An elderly man sitting behind a desk dressed in a dark robe or gown like outfit looks up from his holo pad. "I take it that this Covenant is responsible for the previously unexplained destruction of those three other worlds?" The man asks solemnly.

"We believe this to be the case yes." Replies a man who had a mustache and wore a gray green uniform.

"And do we know where their fleet is now?"

"We have been unable to track their movements." Another man with a beard and dressed in some sort of robe informs him gravely. "They seam to use a method of faster than light travel that we are unfamiliar with."

The elderly man was silent for a moment. "Do we have any idea how many ships they can field against us?" he asked.

"As of yet no. However if you can believe the propaganda they are spreading over the holo net hundreds of thousands." The man in the uniform replies.

"That could be a problem." A younger man in darker robs similar to the bearded man's who had remained silent un till now replies. "We re stretched thin as it is. We can't fight both these invaders and the Separatists. At lest not till the ships that are under construction at Kuat are competed"

"Can we speed up production?" The man at the desk asks.

"Yes, but it will increase the cost." The man in the uniform warns.

"Admiral after today I don't believe you will have any problem with funding. This new threat has the Senate scared and if you say you need more ships and faster than you are currently receiving them. Then I am confident they will give them to you." The man replies.

"Another issue of concern the Covenant is broadcasting a message over the holo net. Calling for all nonhumans to rise up against their human overlords and join the Covenant. We have reports that a number of anti-human groups have already made contact with them. We also have reports that representatives from Geonosis have met with them as well." The man with the beard says. "And it is rumored the Covenant have sent envoys to the Trade Federation, Techno Union, Commerce Guild, and the Banking Clan."

Just then a man with a short military style hair cut and a wearing a green gray uniform of the same design as the Admiral's ran in to the room.

"I am sorry to interrupt Admiral, but I thought you would want to know. We Just lost contact with the Geonosis occupation force."

****End Playback.****

5. Chapter 04

****Chapter 04.****

****November 6****th**** 2552. Spartan Cryo Room.****

I slowly opened my eyes as my cryo pod de-thawed. Sensing I was awake my armor powered up. Data began to scroll across my HUD. Vitals, power were green, and shields were on standby.

I have to say I like the new cryo pods fare better than the old ones. Before the war you would have to enter cryo without clothing or risk freezer burn. Freezer burn was not life threatening, however it was very uncomfortable. Thankfully the Texas was fitted with a new Mk IX cryo pods. I don't know how it works, but somehow the scientists did it. Now we do not have to worry about freezer burn. Of course we Spartans were very appreciative of this as it meant we could enter cryo fully armored and ready to go.

"Rachel, how soon till we exit slipspace?" I asked as I got out of my pod.

"We will be exiting slipspace in five minutes." Rachel informed me.

I looked around the cryo bay. Carter was already out of his pod, Kate was just getting out of hers, Jun was running an armor diagnostic, and Emile was sitting in front of his pod reattaching his knife to his armor. He had gotten very agitated when the techs wouldn't let him enter cryo with it, but Carter managed to convince him to part with it temporarily. Then there was Six already waiting near the door.

I then pulled a calendar up on my HUD. " Rachel, you said it would take us thirty-five days to reach the system."

"That is correct Noble Five."

"But my armor's clock shows that we have only been in cryo for twenty-nine days."

"It would seem that the new drive's speed increases the longer it is in use. Since the drive has never been used for such a long period of time before, it would appear that this phenomenon was not known by the team that tested it."

"Thanks for the info."

"My pleasure, Noble Five."

****UNSC **_**Texas Ranger's**_** Bridge.****

"My God!" Was all Caption Foster could say as _Texas Ranger_ exited slipspace to a sobering seen. There were hundreds maybe thousands of ships or what was left of them orbiting around a planet. The planet it's self was like so many other world I had seen, a burning ball of glass.

"Walker how long ago did this happen?"

"Scans indicate approximately one month Captain."

"That means the Covenant should be long gone by now. Walker have a team of engineers and ODS get ready for a little salvage mission. I want to know more about these other Humans the Covenant has gone to war with." Foster ordered. He then turned to the Commander. "I want Noble team to go with them Commander"

"Understood Sir." Carter replied as he saluted the Captain and we exited the bridge.

****Twenty minutes later. Pelican Foxtrot-216.****

The ship we were heading for was one of the most intact ship we had seen so far. All the other ships in this area were heavily damaged, some beyond recognition. This one however seemed to be fine excluding the fact it appeared to be missing the tower section near its stern. Which we had seen on other ships of it's type.

"Looks like the ventral hanger bay is open." The pilot said. "I'll put us down there."

****Five minutes later unknown ship's ****ventral ****hanger**** bay****.****

"Rachel have you found it yet?" Carter asked our AI team member.

"Yes Commander, activating hangar shield now, re-pressurizing hangar-bay, reactivating gravity in three, two, one."

"Thank you Rachel. Have you managed to get into their mainframe yet?"

"Unfortunately the connection to the computer core to this terminal has been severed. I do however have access the ships layout. We should find the ships data core one deck above us."

"Alright then Kat you and me will head up to the data core. Meanwhile I want the engineers to stay here, Jun keep an eye on them. The rest

of you secure the ship."

****Unknown ship's computer core****

Carter placed Rachel's data crystal near the computer core's data port allowing her to transfer into it."

"Well this is nice." Rachel said through the coms system. "Not really much in the way of security in here. It might keep a most human hackers out, but it wouldn't even slow down a Cyber Worrier-class dumb AI."

"That's fine Rachel. Can you tell us what happened here?" Carter asked looking at the body of a human in white armor with a piece of debris imbedded in his chest.

"According to the ships log Lieutenant Grftin Dredman assumed command of the vessel when the bridge and flight control towers were blown away and the entire command crew was killed. With the command crew dead and the ships shield generator destroyed they was a sitting ducks. So the Lieutenant ordered the crew to evacuate."

"Well that explains why there is so few body's. Is there any thing worth while still in there, or was it all wiped?" Carter asked looking away from the dead body.

"Oh quit a lot actually." Rachel said excitedly. "It would seam they are rather lax when it comes to security."

"What did you fined?"

"Oh just basic data on every known ship, species, and worlds these people know of. As well as blueprints and operating manuals for all the technology on this ship."

"Your kidding! Why wouldn't they destroy all that data before abandoning ship?" Kat asked surprise evident in her voice.

"Apparently they didn't consider it important." Rachel replied. "What ever the case may be this data will be invaluable to use."

"Right well I guess we better get to work. "The Commander keyed his com, "Jun I want you to secure a few of the bodies we found. Doc may want to do an autopsy see how close they really are to use." Carter than trend to Noble Two. "Kat go fined the others tell Six to take the engineers and a few of the ODST to engineering and see what they can fined. Then take Emile and Alfred to the forward hanger bay and see what you can fined there."

"Yes Commander." Kat saluted and ran off.

"Rachel can you patch me through to the Captain?"

"I'll have to rout you through the secondary com relays one moment." Rachel said. "There you go."

"Command this is Carter-A-259 do you read me?" Carter said into his helmet com.

"It's a little fuzzy Commander but we Ready you." Captain Foster replied

"We have secured the ship Captain. Rachel is in the mainframe and found they didn't wipe much if any thing." Carter reported.

"That's good news Commander. Have you found any thing ells?" Foster asked

"We are securing a few bodies for the Doctor to look at. I sent the engineers to take a look at engineering. And I have a team on there way to check out the forward hanger bay."

"Good if you fined any thing let me know captain Fost.."

"Just a moment Captain." Rachel interrupted. "I have just bean going over the specs for this ships FTL drive. I believe it would be useful to remove it and brig it back to the _Texas_."

"How long would it take and what would you need?" Foster asked warily.

"It shouldn't take more than a few hours. As for tools I believe we can fined what we need here. However another engineering team would be useful as well as four service drones."

"All right I will have them sent over. Captain Foster out."

****Main corridor in rout to forward hangar bay.****

"Hay guys come see what I found" I called to the team.

"What is it?" Kat asked as she and Emile came over to where I was.

"I think it is a droid." I said as I removed some debris allowing them to better see what I had found. It had a dome head, cylinder shaped body, white and dark green paint job. Two legs on either side of it, and a round optical sensor was mounted in things dome.

"His sort of cute." Kat said.

"So these people use robots." Emile said. " what's the big deal?"

"Way to kill the mood Emile. This thing will have data on the people it works for. In fact it could be just as valuable as an intact data core." I scolded him.

"Come on what could this thing have in it that would be so valuable?" Emile asked crossing his arms over his chest and leaning heavily on his left foot cussing him to lean.

"This droid looks like it is some sort of utility droid. If so then it was probably programmed to roam the ship unsupervised doing its job. That would mean it could have recorded all kinds of things ONI would kill for, and I mean kill for." I made sure to emphasis kill.

"Well I guess you would know. You are the ONI spook." Emile said.

"I am not!" I said as I lifted the droid out of the debris and set it down. It was a little banged up, but he didn't seem to worse for wear. "Besides I don't think ONI trusts me." I think Emile was about to remark on that, but he was interrupted because the droid I had just found decided to power up. It moved it's domed head around looking at us and then made some beeping and whistling noises.

"Hu the thing must have been on stand by." Kat said. "I wonder what that whistling means."

"I think he was asking us who we are." I replied.

"How can you know that?" Emile scoffed.

"I can't, but the town of his whistling sounded like a question."

"What ever." Emile replied. "If you are don here can we get going? We still have to check out the main hanger bay."

"Ya I am done here." As we walked down the hall I looked back to find the little droid just sitting there where I had left it watching us. I turned round and faced him "Come on you." I said. "Can't wait here all day." The little droid then looked down the hall way both ways as if he was going to cross a street. Then apparently making up his mind he scurried over to where I was.

****UNSC **_**Texas Ranger**_** Bridge.****

"So lets see if I understand this correctly! You want to install an unknown alien FTL drive that isn't even meant to be used on this ship and that no one except for possibly you knows how to operate. Am I correct?" Captain Foster asked Rachel.

"Well technically its not an alien drive and Walker, Lieutenant Sanford, and Lieutenant Commander Hogan have a decent understanding of how it works," Rachel replied coolly.

"Look Rachel I know this drive is supposed to be faster, but unless you can assure me with one-hundred percent certainty that this drive will work and not destroy my ship I am not letting you install it." "Captain I am one-hundred percent certain this drive will work and I am sure Walker will back me up." Rachel insisted.

"Well we will have to run a few simulations after its installed to make sure every thing is working right, but Rachel is right there should be no problem using the drive," Walker replied, all the while Rachel was watching him as if she would burn holes in him with her eyes if he gave the wrong answer.

"Fine I will allow you to install it, but Lieutenant Sanford, and Lieutenant Commander Hogan better be in agreement that this thing is going to work before we use it. Understood?"

"Perfectly." Rachel said with a smile.

****UNSC **_**Texas Ranger**_** Hangar bay two.****

"Let's see that's sixty rifles, two-hundred carbines, two-hundred

pistols, and four-hundred grenades." I said as I entered the numbers into my data pad.

"Don't forget the thousand or so assortment of power packs for those things." Six reminded me.

"Lieutenant were do you want us to put these walker things?" An ensign yelled out in reference to a number of two legged scout vehicles we had brought back."

"Line them up over there next to those AT-TE's." I instructed

"The what?"

"The six legged walkers." Six shouted back.

"Yes Sir."

"So Six how well did that gunship handle?" I asked.

"It handled surprisingly well, but I would hate to actually take the thing out in combat. Its like fling a target."

"Well you should try out one of those little wedged shaped fighters I brought over. Its like the hot rod of space fighters."

"I will definitely have to do that." Six said "But what about that six winged fighter you found the one were the smaller wings fold into the two bigger ones?"

"It handles well but it's heavier than the small one and it shoes, that aside you do feel better protected, but I don't like having the main weapons mounted on the wing tips. They are too easily damaged out there and it would be more difficult to hit close in targets."

"What did you think of this one?" I said as I patted a yellow colored fighter that looked like a Y when viewed from above.

"I liked it. it's a bit heavier than a Saber and not quite as quick, but you feel like your in a tank and nothing can touch you. You know the sort of feeling you get when fling a Longsword."

"Ya I know what you mean." I said as I remembered my first time fling the Longsword. Mean while Six was looking around the hangar.

"Hay Alfred where did those droids we recovered go?"

"Rachel requested there help installing that hyperdrive." I said.
"Apparently they are a sort of jack of all triads."

****UNSC **_**Texas Ranger**_** Captain's quarters.****

Captain Foster sat in his quarters reading the reports and information packets Walker had sent him. All though a cruiser was one of the most prestige's assignments a captain could receive in the UNSC navy, the Captains quarters aboard one were not overly luxurious, especially aboard a Halcyon-class. The apartment that surveyed as Foster's quarters was not very large, but comfortably accommodated one occupant. The main room held his desk and personal

computer terminal as well as a leather easy chair and sofa. Connected to this room were two others, his bedroom and his personal shower. Currently Captain Foster was seated at his desk reading an information packet on his data pad.

Foster put down his data pad on his desk, leaned back in his chair and rubbed his face with his hands. He had been going through information packets for four or five hours.

"Captain long-range sensor drones have picked up a slipspace rupture." Walker informed the Captain as he materialized on his desk's holoprojector. Captain Foster nearly leaped out of his chair at the news.

"Walker instructed the drones to self destruct we don't have time to retrieve them." Foster said as he got out of his chair and put on his jacket. "Then jump us out of here." Foster then paused for a moment. "Walker what's the status of that hyperdrive?"

"It has been fully installed. Rachel and I have so far run three simulations and were about to perform a fourth."

"Is it operational?" Asked impatiently.

"Yes Captain."

"Good to hear that I don't want the Covenant picking up a slipspace wake."

"Where to Captain?" Walker asked as Foster turned to exit his quarters.

"Anywhere, but here!" Foster shouted back as he ran down the hallway towards the bridge.

6. Chapter 05

****Chapter 05.****

****November 7****th**** 2552 UNSC **_**Texas Ranger**_**.**

"Rachel are you sure we can try for a shield generator at this cloud city and still remain off the radar?" Foster asked the AI as he stood and examined a holoprojector image of the galaxy.

"I'm not sure we have much choice Captain." Commander Lee, Texas's first officer and Foster's longtime friend, replied. "The EMP flack works, but if we face more than one cruiser we won't stand a chance. Besides we don't even know if it will work on the weapons this Republic is using, should they prove to be hostile."

"And it will allow us to gather more intel on what is going on. We know the Covenant arrived several months ago, but we have no real idea how either side is faring right now." Rachel added.

"Fine!" Foster huffed. "We will give it a try. Set course for Bepin."

****GRS **_**Casta.**_****

Aubrie Wyn sat in her cabin, her hands folded on her lap as she stared at the deck at her feet. So many good clones and Jedi had been lost at the battle for Ryloth, including her master Sirrus. That was a week ago. Since then she had assumed command of the frigate Casta, and had been dodging Covenant forces while trying to link back up with a friendly fleet. But every time they tried to get back to the Republic's lines the Covenant were blocking the hyper lane. So now she was stuck in the back end of the galaxy, at a little known mining facility, with a tiered crew, a ship poorly armed to take on the enemy they were facing, no way home and she didn't dare try to contact the Republic for fear the Covenant would intercept the transmission and trace it. Arial looked up from the deck when her desk com buzzed, she got up and activated it.

"Yes what is it?" Aubrie asked tiredly.

"Commander you might want to get up here. A ship just arrived, and doesn't match anything we have on record."

"You know it could just be a privately built and owned ship. It's not unusual to see that out here."

"I thought of that mam, but this thing is big. I am talking cruiser size."

"Okay that is unusual. I will be right up."

****UNSC **_**Texas Ranger**_**. ****

"Unidentified vessel, this is cloud control pleas identify yourself and state your business here."

"Cloud control, this is Captain Foster of the Texas Ranger, requesting permission to dock and make repairs."

"This is cloud control. Permission granted Texas Ranger pleas dock at docking bay eight."

"Well that went better than I had expected." Commander Lee said.

"Yes, well we will see how things go once we dock." Foster replied. "Walker inform Noble I want them standing by, in case something goes wrong. Rachel, have you made any progress on that translator program so our people can actually read their writing."

"Yes captain as long as they are wearing there HUD they should reserve a real time translation of what they are reading."

"Good! Is the contact team ready?"

"Yes Captain Lieutenant Parker and his team are standing by as we speak."

The Texas Ranger slowly descended into the clouds of Bespin and approached the floating city. As she descended Texas was flanked by several small red craft that escorted her in. Cloud city was a sight to behold. It was a massive saucer shaped structure with an antenna protruding from the base and plunging out of sight into the clouds

below the city. On the top side of the saucer were numerous towers and other buildings, and to add to the seen was the blue sky, white clouds and the sun shining off the polished metal of cloud city.

"We'll that's something you don't see every day." Commander Lee said to Foster.

"True you don't, but I don't think anyone in the UEG ever thought a mining platform this big would be practical." Foster replied as the Texas glided into dock eight.

"Actually there have been plans on the drawing board for a mining station very near to this however with the war there haven't been the resources to build it, and no guaranty the Covenant wouldn't destroy it before it was of any benefit." Rachel informed them.

****GRS **_**Casta**_**. ****

"Have you found anything on that ship yet?" Aubrie asked as she watched the massive ship dock with cloud city.

"No mam, but scans have reviled some things." The clone siting at a console in front of her replied.

"It has unusually thick armor plating that and the ships interior seems to be heavily reinforced. It makes it hard to get good readings, but this ship could take one hell of a beating even without shields."

"So can you tell me anything ells?"

"Well it appears to have an enormous amount of missile pods, as well as what seems to be a very well laid out point defense grid made up of retractable turrets. It also has eight massive mass driver turrets, and what I think is a spinal mounted mass driver. If it were to hit us with that it would likely shatter us like glass. Other than that I am having trouble getting anything ells that isn't close to the outer hull. I can tell you its main engines are ion thrusters, and it has a couple hanger bays with some craft I am not familiar with, but that's about it. Anything ells that would be of interest on that ship must be closer to its core.

"Mam we are getting a call from the city's counsel. Asking whether or not you would like to be there when their representative meats the shore party from that unknown ship."

"Tell them I will be right there." Aubrie replied to the clone at the com station. Wyn wondered as she walked off the bridge were this strange vessel had come from. The ship seamed to use a large number of mass drivers. That was unusual to see even in this part of the galaxy. Mass drivers were considered a primitive weapon by most in the galaxy, although some pirates and planetary defense forces still used them for their ability to bypass ray shields. Then there was the amount of missiles and armor the ship had, both were very impressive. The number of missiles that ship could fire at one time was staggering. They would easily overrun the point defense on any ship she knew of. And then there was its armor and the way its interior seemed to be constructed. Who ever built that ship wanted it to be capable of surviving a great deal of damage. There was only one thing

that ship could have been built for, but what was it doing here?

****UNSC **_**Texas Ranger**_**. ****

Lieutenant Parker took a deep, he was about to meet new aliens and humans who somehow got to this part of the galaxy long before humans on earth knew there were other worlds. Parker quickly looked around at his party to make sure everything was in place.

Ensign O'Reilly stood next to him on his left, behind him and O'Reilly were ensign Bishop and one of the droids they had recovered from the wrecked republic ship, and behind them were two ODST in their black armor and polarized helmets.

Seeing that everyone was ready Parker hit the button to open the airlock. There on the other side stood four people to greet them to the city. Two of them were human the other two were alien. One was blue skinned and had tentacles protruding from her head instead of hair, other than that she looked almost human. The other alien was also humanoid but instead of tentacles he had horn growing out of his head like a crown. The first of the two humans was a heavily built man with a white beard and hair. Smith guest he was somewhere in his sixty's. The second human was a young female with brown hair, and eyes, and was dressed in brown and tan robes.

Well this was going to be interesting if nothing else. Parker thought to himself.

****Cloud City.****

"So you will trade one Covenant fighter, two drop ships, a mobile Covenant plasma mortar, and six crates of Covenant small arms. In exchange for a Phobos-Kingsmeyer 262-C8e shield generator?" Counselor Bendrid asked slowly.

"Yes we are this is what we are offering." Lieutenant Parker replied calmly, as he sipped at his alien beverage he had been given. So far the meeting had been going smoothly. Once the council members found out that they wanted to trade Covenant tech for a shield generator, they had nearly jumped at the chance. However like the good business men they were they had held back for more. And their patients had been rewarded. Not that Parker minded too much, a Covenant fighter and two drop ships were a small price to pay for a working ship grade shield generator. That sort of tech could change the course of the war, or at the very least keep the UNSC in the fight long enough to find something else to turn the tide.

"My we ask how you came by these items." Arruna the blue alien that Smith had learned from Rachel were called Twi'leks, asked.

"Let's just say we relieved one of their cruisers of them as it seemed they wouldn't be needing them anymore." Parker replied.

Aubrie raised an eyebrow in surprise at that statement. Apparently these people had managed to disable a Covenant cruiser and then boarded it. Aubrie guessed that's why they were here looking for a new shield generator. Their original had probably been damaged in the fight. But still that was an impressive feat.

"Very well Lieutenant we will have the equipment sent to your ship. And you can deliver your payment to landing pad fifty-three." Counselor Bendrid informed Smith.

"Thank you I will inform my Captain."

****UNSC **_**Texas Ranger**_**. ****

While Rachel was surfing the holo net, the diplomatic team worked out a deal with the city's counsel, and the crew went about their business. Walker was running a diagnostic on the ships weapon systems and engines. He was also monitoring all communications channels on cloud city, as well as ten long-range sensor drones, but even with all that he was still rather bored.

Walker was a third generation ship board combats AI. In other words he was specifically designed to enhance his ships ability's in combated. He could with easy control all forty of Texas's point-defense turrets, the eight sixteen inch guns, the twenty onager's mounted on Texas's port and starboard sides, acquire targets for the ship's MAC, plot the best course to bring the gun to bar on said target, and acquire a target for all missiles currently loaded. That was a total of three nukes and seven thousand eight hundred archer missiles. He could also coordinate with all the pilots from two wings of fighters assigned to the Texas at the same time in order to direct their attacks, identify the most critical targets, and keep them informed of how the battle was developing around them. And on top of it all while he was doing this he could also coordinate with a fleet of AI doing the same thing. Of course at that level of activity his processing power would be heavily taxed. Thus the usefulness of a human crew, they freed his processing power up for things like cyber warfare and other tasks where he was decidedly better than his human companions.

So given that there were know battles involving a few hundred ships going on right now. Walker found himself with a lot a processing power available and no way to use it. But that was about to change. Just then drone seven picked up an anomaly, a moment later it had a visual of three ships.

"Captain we have a situation, Three Covenant ships just dropped out of slipspace at the edge of the system and are headed this way."

"Damn it." Foster cursed. "What class are they?"

"Two frigate class and one destroyer class."

"How soon till they arrive?" Foster asked as he got up from his desk.

"At their current speed eighteen hours. Should I sound battle stations Captain?" Walker asked eagerly.

"Not yet Walker, get me the Governor of Could City. Looks like he is going to get some unwelcome company."

****Chapter 06.****

****November 7****th**** 2552 UNSC **_**Texas Ranger**_** 16:00 Hours.****

"Sir I don't think you fully grasp the gravity of your situation. If you fight the Covenant will just destroy the city, try to evacuate, sure a few will get away but most will still die." Captain Foster told Guvnor Dradinz. "However if we can make them think that Cloud City or something on Cloud City is valuable to them. We may be able to hold them off long enough to take out their ships."

"How do you intend to do that Captain?" Dradinz asked worry and panic was evident in his voice and written all over his face. He was clearly in over his head.

"Leave that to me." Foster replied calmly. "My ship and her crew will do what we can to help, but I need to know what sort of security forces you have."

"Well there is the Wing Guard at last count I believe it consisted of about one-hundred and twenty thousand personnel, we also have maybe sixty Storm IV Cloud Cars. But you should really be talking to Commander Wyn I turned command of the Wing Guard and the city's defense over to her." Dradinz hastily informed Foster.

"Thank you Guvnor I will." Foster said before terminating the connection. Hopefully this Commander Wyn would be more helpful than the Guvnor. Foster knew he didn't have to stay and help defend the city. After all it wasn't a UNSC facility, but it did have a population of six million and most of that was human. Foster just couldn't stand by and let them be slaughtered, not when there was a chance to save them.

"Walker ETA on the Covenant?"

"Seventeen hours thirty-six minutes and counting Captain." Walker answered coolly.

"Very well. Ensign get me Commander Wyn on the com." Foster ordered his coms officer.

****GRS **_**Casta**_**. ****

"Mam we are receiving a hail from the Texas Ranger." The clone manning the coms informed Aubrie.

"Very well put them through." Aubrie ordered. "Captain Foster I am a little surprised you haven't left yet."

"_And miss the party."_ Foster joked. "_Not on your life. In fact that's what I am calling you about. I have a plan for saving the city and taking out the Covenant ships, but I am going to need your help._"

"Well I am not about to turn down help. What did you have in mind?"

****Cloud City Central Tower November 8****th**** 02:00 Hours.****

I stepped out of the central tower onto the balcony and surveyed my surrounding's. The plan the Captain had come up with to keep the Covenant from burning the city out of the sky was rather ingenious. However it had me stuck in a fixed position with the job of defending said position until I was either over run, killed all the Covenant, or the Texas managed to destroy the three Covenant ships.

All I had for backup was two platoons of Marines, one of ODS1 and one made up of Republic troopers from the Republic frigate that was here. Then there was their commander some girl that I doubted would be of much use, but her troopers seemed to have a lot of faith in her.

The Captain had thankfully left setting up the towers defenses to me and I went all out. I had six M68 gauss guns set up around the tower as well as a number of heavy machine gun emplacements inside and outside the tower. I also set up a couple MG42's to cover the entrances into the tower.

So what was this plan? Well the Captains plan was to make the Covenant think there was a Forerunner artifact in the city. And my job was to make sure that when they sent troops to investigate. They met such fierce resistance they would believe without a doubt there was a relic in the central tower.

"Noble 5 they took the bait. Once they picked up the transmission about an artifact and that we were going to be moving it they jumped. They're now in orbit and deploying drop ships. They will be on you in ten minutes."

"Thanks Rachel I will be sure to have the welcoming comity ready for them." I said cheerily.

****Central Tower Main Entrance.****

"Okay Marines we have incoming. Let's give them a fiery welcome." Spartan-B228 announced over the towers PA system.

Oorah the Marines and ODS1 shouted in response to the news. Aubire was still at a loss as to where these people had come from. She had pretty much handed command over to Captain Foster, but she was glad she had. Foster was by far more knowledge in the art of war than she was. There was one thing Aubire had noticed. These people were definitely prepared and trained for this sort of thing. Whoever had funded the construction of that ship had definitely made sure they were well equipped, but where were they from. She had tried and tried to find out, but none of the personnel from that ship would talk about it. Aubire was puzzled but she had a job to do right now and where the Texas Ranger and her crew came from would have to wait till later.

Aubire looked to the sky as the city's alarms began to sound. Through the clouds came a large number of purple drop ships.

"We have Spirits and Phantoms incoming." A Marine shouted as he manned his mass accelerator cannon. Soldiers armed with twin barreled rocket launchers took up their positions and the marines on mounted weapons prepped them and brought them to bear on the approaching enemy.

A short time later the sky around the central tower erupted in fire. Aubire was shocked and impressed at how much fire power these soldiers could throw at the Covenant, but even though the Marines managed to drastically thin their numbers some still made it to the tower and began offloading troops.

Three drop-ships landed on the other side of the bridge that led to the tower's main entrance. Aubire stood in the entranceway, she activated her light saber its green blade creating a faint glow around her. Aubire moved into a defensive stance ready to face the oncoming Covenant, but they never made it across the bridge. Once they had reached the halfway point the Marines opened fire. Spartan-B228 had set up a M247H and a MG460 at the entrance, which combined with the fire from the twenty marines and clones that were there the Covenant were cut down within seconds.

****Cloud City, Financial District.****

Noble 6 stood in the center of the Financial District. This was basically like a long strip mall with little offices and shops along either wall, there was also a second level with a walk way on either side with the same set up.

Six looked like he was alone and that's how he wanted it, but in reality there were Marines and ODST hidden in every place imaginable. Six knew a sizable Covenant force was coming his way and he wanted them to charge right in, then there would be no escape for them.

He didn't have to wait long. When the Covenant point saw that only a single Spartan stood in their way they rushed forward and a moment later the rest followed. Six waited till the last moment to give the command to fire and when he did it seemed like the hallway exploded. Fifteen minutes later the Financial District was a smoking ruin covered in blood, but Six and his Marines had won with very few casualties.

****Cloud City, Governors Tower.****

Jun had a good view he wasn't in the central tower because Carter wanted him to provide over watch for Alfred's team if they got into trouble, but he still had a pretty good view of the city he had already taken out five Zealots and a number of commanders. Jun zoomed in on the Covenant staging area just out of reach of the central tower's defenses. There was another commander readying his troops for attack. Jun sighted in, berthed in, then out counted his heartbeats and then in-between beats he squeezed the trigger, the Elite was no more and Jun had one more to his kill count.

****Cloud City, City Square.****

Emile was having the time of his life as he blasted an Elite in the face with his shotgun. He had simply set up a defensive position right in the middle of the City Square to lure the Covenant out into the open, but he had positioned the majority of his men on the high ground surrounding the square. This way when the Covenant came to dislodge him from his position they got hit from nearly every direction. It was like shooting fish in a barrel and Emile loved it.

****Cloud City, Repulsorlift Control Room.****

Kat stood in the Control room both her magnums were drawn, she was covered in Covenant blood and all-around her lay Covenant and Human corpses. The Covenant had tried to take the repulsorlifts, the only thing keeping the city in the air, but Kat had stopped them. She may have had to overlade a few power conduits and rigged a few maintenance droids, but then all's fair in war.

****Cloud City Wing Guards Command.****

Carter watched as the battle unfolded and directed troops were needed. He would have preferred to be out fighting, but someone had to be in charge and Captain Foster had insisted it be him. So far the battle was going well for them, but Carter was concerned that Alfred might have difficulty holding the central tower much longer. Alfred's forces were slowly being chipped away and the Covenant kept throwing more and more at him.

****UNSC **_**Texas Ranger**_**. ****

Captain Foster stood on the bridge watching the displays showing him what was happening. Foster was waiting for the perfect time to strike. In order for his plan to work Foster had to wait for the Covenant to drop their shields. Foster knew they had to drop a portion of their shields every time they deployed their drop ships. They had already sent the first waive and it had been destroyed. The Covenant would most certainly send another much larger waive, probably with armor this time. That would be when he would strike. The Texas and Casta were hidden deep within the Bespin atmosphere, it was a dangerous move as the pressure was putting a lot of stress on the ships hulls but it was necessary to stay hidden. Once the time was right they would emerge and hit the Covenant with their shields down.

"Captain their launching it looks like it's everything they have!" Walker said.

"That's our queue." Foster said calmly. "All hands battle station. Send the bastards to hell!"

The Texas and Casta went into a full combat burn. Their dorsal thruster's glowed bright blue and the two ships rocketed up out of the planet's atmosphere.

It was definitely one of the most amazing sights I have ever seen. First the clouds seemed to bubble upward and then separate revealing the two war ships as they emerged from the clouds. The Covenant were completely cot off guard, before they knew what was happening Texas had cored the destroyer and one of the frigates. The second frigate managed to get its shields up and survived the MAC round that hit it and sent it tumbling out of control. Texas and Casta then hammered that frigate with everything they had. Within moments of righting its self the frigates shields failed minutes after, riddled with holes it nose-dived into the clouds to be crushed by Bespin's atmosphere.

****Cloud City, Central Tower.****

Aubire was too busy to pay attention to what was going on in the sky above the city. The Covenant had sent down every solder and vehicle

they had and Cloud City was now teeming with those hinge heads and gas suckers. The Covenant had landed armor across the bridge and had shelled the entrance until Aubire and the few remaining clones and marines had been forced to retreat back into the tower. The marines and clones fought valiantly, but the Covenant still pushed them back inch by inch floor by floor. Spartan-B228 had called for reinforcements, but the Covenant had set up a perimeter of Durasteel around the tower. And nothing Spartans-B228's allies did could penetrate their defenses.

Aubire now stood alone human and alien blood alike stained her robes. She was surrounded by three hinge heads, marines and clones lade around her, their body's covered in plasma burns. The three Elites circled around Aubire snarling at her, these Elites Aubire knottiest were different from the ones she had fought before. Their armor was black and more ornate than the standard hinge head and instead of blue energy swords they had red ones. Aubire raised her saber to defend herself.

"Hay! Why don't you take on some one more your size?" A voice called from the door of the room they were in. Aubire and the Elites looked to see who it was, there stood the Spartan no weapons visible.

"Demon I was tolled you had been dealt with." The lead Elite answered with a snarl.

"Sorry to disappoint you." I said as I reached behind me and retrieved my energy swords. "But I couldn't miss this party." I continued as I activated the swords. The one in my right hand was blue and the one in my left was red. After I had done that the lead Elites eyes narrowed.

"You! I shall enjoy killing you demon." The lead Elite shouted as he charged me.

I was slightly surprised by the Elites reaction to me and how he seemed to know who I was, but this wasn't the time to ask questions. I sidestepped the leaders charge and slashed at his side, but he was quick and managed to block it. He swung his sword at me and I parried it with my right and stabbed with my left, but he twisted to his left avoiding my strike. I glanced over to where Aubire was and found she was only fighting one Elite. I realized the other one was trying to flank me, and I dove forward rolled and stood back up narrowly avoiding losing my head. I then spun round to face my two opponents. For a second we stared each other down wondering who would move first. I moved first, the Elites are big and powerful opponents, but they are slower than Spartans and I used this to my advantage. As I charged the Elite who tried to decapitate me swung, but I ducked and slid under him nearly cutting him in half as I passed under him. I quickly rolled over and stood up to face the leader, I then heard Aubire get hit and saw her go flying across the room. I spun round and through my right sword at the Elite and cot him in the chest. And then I leaped up in the air and did a back flip jumping right over the Leader of the group as he charged me, but he spun round and kicked me in the chest sending me staggering backward.

"You are a worthy opponent Demon I did not believe the report when I heard it, but you are out matched and I will end you here."

"You think so!" I said getting ready to charge. "One of us certainly is going to die here today but I am betting it's you." The two of us then charged, our swords were a blur for a few moments as we parried and attacked, but then the fight abruptly stopped and the Elites leader staggered back and looked at his chest and found a plasma grenade stuck to his solar plexus. The grenade detonated scattering the Elites parts across the room.

****GRS Casta November 10****th**** 06:00 Hours.****

Aubire watched as the last ship of civilians left the city. They had won the battle, but they still lost the city. It was no longer safe now that the Covenant had paid it a visit, and they would be back you could be sure of that so everyone was leaving. Aubire wasn't sure where she should go the only place left for her to go was Hut space. Aubire side, she didn't really like the Huts, but they were not at war with the Republic and so far had not sided with the Covenant.

Aubire left the bridge after giving the order to set course for Hut space. She thought back to the battle as she walked to her quarters. She had seen a lot of things in this war, but what had taken place on Cloud City was by far the most unusual.

****November 10****th**** 2552 UNSC **_**Texas Ranger**_** 10:00 Hours.****

I stood near a porthole and stared into space. That Elite seemed to know who I was or at least thought he did, that was a little unnerving. How could he have known? There had been no survivors I had made sure of that, and the facility had been destroyed. Unless! damn it that one. The second mission it had been too easy now I knew why, they had been watching. That disturbance the Prowler had picked up it must have been a cloaked ship probably receiving a tight beam transmission from the surface. They knew a Spartan was responsible for their facility's going dark and the fact I had a red energy sword would have been evidence enough that I was responsible, only the Black Hand had red energy swords. Oh well I guess we had to face them openly some time.

8. Chapter 07

****Chapter 07.****

****December 25****th**** 2552 UNSC **_**Texas Ranger**_** 16:00 Hours.****

Christmas, a day of peace and good will to all men, unless a war was going on, but even then traditionally back when humans fought humans, we often stopped fighting at least for a moment. However the Covenant didn't know anything about Christmas and for the past twenty-seven years the war had never stopped for Christmas, but today for the first time I could remember it did or at least it did for us.

I walked into the rec room. In the center someone had set up a portable holo projector and had programed it to display a large decorated fir tree. All around the room hung decorations and from the speakers played Christmas music. I had to smile a little as I sat down and began reading a book on my data pad. I hadn't seen anything

like this since I was five, I still remembered my father coming home with the tree, my brothers, sisters, and myself helping to decorate it. My mother making short bread and ginger bread cookies and all sorts of other things that she only made at that time of year. I remembered it all, but like everything else the Covenant had taken it away from me. That was one of the reasons I had agreed to become a Spartan when ONI had approached me. I might have only been six at the time, but I knew what I wanted to do to the Covenant and ONI was willing to help me do it.

I looked around the room and for the first time in years I saw Christmas being celebrated by front-line soldiers without a care in the world.

****Captain's Quarters.****

Captain Foster sat in his quarters he looked over at his desk. A little droid designed for children sat there powered down. Foster had bought the little droid for his son, at the last planet they had stopped. He knew there was no way he was going to be able to give it to him this Christmas, but perhaps next time. Foster then opened a small case and looked at the necklace he had gotten for his wife. it had a Corusca gem set in it. Foster smiled as he thought about his wife, he couldn't wait to see her again, but he had a job to do. He had to make sure his family and the rest of humanity was safe, once that was done he could go home.

Right then there was a buzz from door.

"Come!" Foster yelled and in walked Commander Lee.

"Captain we just picked up the slip space probe from FLEETCOME."

"Well what do they have to say?" Foster asked as he motioned for Lee to take a seat.

"Not a whole lot most of it is actually male for the crew."

"That couldn't have come at a better time." Foster said with a smile.

"I agree! As for FLEETCOME they just want us to send a report of the situation out here as soon as possible. They also want us to scout out locations for possible forward outposts." Lee informed Foster. Apparently they are going to be sending a Phoenix refit with their next message instead of a probe."

"Sounds like command wants to gain a foothold out here." Foster remarked.

"They will probably be even more eager to do so once they get our next report."

****Spartan's Quarters.****

Six sat at his desk and examined a holo vid of a recent space battle the Texas had observed. It wasn't a very large battle only about twenty ships to each side. However there were two new ships in the Republics fleet that Six had not seen before. They followed the

standard wedge shape that most Republic ships conformed to but were larger than other Republic ships and the tower in the back had been redesigned. Although no one had seen fit to reposition the main guns so that they could all fire forward. Still they proved to be very potent vessels managing to destroy four Covenant destroyers before the Covenant pulled out.

So far the _Texas_ had observed ten battles between the Covenant and Republic. It was painfully obvious that the Republic was not prepared to fight an enemy like the Covenant. The Republics strategy was to leave a garrison at every world and then keep their main fleet in reserve. The idea being that the garrison force would hold the enemy off long enough for the main fleet to arrive. It wasn't a bad strategy; it was just that the Republic underestimated how long their defense fleets could hold out against a full scale attack. The Republic would generally leave two cruisers and their escorts to defend a planet. This was no where near enough to stop a Covenant assault carrier and its escorts. The Covenant were using hit and run tactics, hitting Republic worlds and doing as much damage as possible before the main Republic fleet arrived. The Republic had tried to assault the Covenants base of operation located on the planet Geonosis, their attempt failed miserably. The Covenant had moved a massive station to Geonosis, accompanied by the largest fleet anyone in the UNSC had ever seen. To be fair the Republic had sent a fleet that would have made any UNSC admiral envious, but when it was all over the Republic was no longer in a position to go on the offensive.

Meanwhile, while the Republic fought desperately to stop the Covenant from overrunning their defenses, the outer rim was getting picked apart. A world had two choices, give up their human population to be slaughtered and joined the Covenant, or be wiped out. No one took the second option if they had the option.

Six watched the battle and noted how the Republic ships maintained a looser formation than he had seen in other battles, probably to give them more room to maneuver. He also observed that the smaller weaker vessels held back and used the larger ships as shields until they got within weapons range. They used a missile screen to help draw the Covenants point defense fire from their fighters and bombers which followed in close behind. The Republic bombers also focused on the Covenants weapons emplacements; they had apparently learned that the Covenant had to drop shields over their weapons in order to fire, thus leaving them open to attack. Six hoped the Republic would finish developing the tactics and ship they would need before it was too late, because if the Republic failed the UNSC would be next.

****UNSC **_**Texas Ranger**_** Cyber Space.****

Walker and Rachel were both fourth generation smart AI. This usually meant that when the crew was taking it easy and the ship was doing nothing, that the AI would be bored. However they were both on the same ship using the same network and right now to stave off boredom they were battling it out in cyber space.

Rachel Was in command of a small Republic fleet that she had modified. Walker was commanding a UNSC fleet made up of ships he had modified.

Right now Rachel and Walker were locked in a desperate knife fight.

The battle had started with Walker defending a planet and Rachel attacking it. Walker had had the advantage of range on his side, but Rachel had made a daring move and made a pinpoint jump with her fleet. It was theoretically possible to do that with a slipstream drive, and had been done with hyper drives. However it was considered a very bad idea. Rachel had pulled it off though and was giving Walker a hard time.

Walker saw an opportunity and took control of one of his Marathon cruisers. It was about to pass a Star Destroyer with only a hundred meters to spar. Walker fired the maneuvering thrusters bringing the cruisers port missile pods to bear on the enemy vessel. As the two ships passed each other he fired every missile he had. The results were devastating nearly the whole starboard side of the destroyer was obliterated. Its engines flickered for a moment before going dark and the ship slowly tumbled into space out of control.

The battle was far from over though, Rachel still had a combat effective fleet and Republic vessels had the advantage in these close in battles. Walker had to think of something fast his fleet was taking losses and soon there would be no reversing the situation. Walker decided to try something it was risky, but he was running out of options.

Within a split second Walker had programmed a very intricate set of maneuvers for every frigate in his fleet to perform. He waited and then when it was time he gave the command. Every frigate in his fleet broke off from the battle; it looked like they were running away, but then they fired their maneuvering thrusters a full emergency burn and did a complete one hundred and eighty degree flip. They selected their targets and fired. Walker's calculations had been near perfect. Almost every shot hit its target and friendly fire was kept to a minimal. Walker eminently ordered his ships out of the combat zone to regroup and also to avoid colliding with the dead ships now littering the area.

"That was a blatant violation of protocol." Rachel complained after the battle. "Protocol clearly states that you are not to fire a ship's main cannon into a combat zone where friendly forces are engaged in close combat with the enemy."

"Rachel you can't always play by the rules." Walker explained. "I was losing, and I made a calculated risk. I calculated that I would damage or destroy more of your ships than I would of mine. My call was right and I saved the planet. If that had been real I would have been called a hero, and if it had failed I would have been destroyed and the planet taken and it wouldn't have mattered anyway. We can't always abide by protocol. The humans don't and if they did great admirals like Cole would never have existed."

January 06**th**** 2553 UNSC **_**Texas Ranger**_** 09:00 Hours.**

"Well this looks like it was made for a forward outpost two terrestrial class planets, a gas giant with three large moons, and a good sized asteroid field."

"That and it is located in a dense star cluster so it is unlikely anyone in this part of the galaxy has been here before. It is currently not on any of their star maps." Foster commented. "Start

sending teams down and once they have found a suitable location we will set up a fire base on the second terrestrial planet. Also have a few flights of Lonswords sent to get pulmonary sweeps of all the other planetary body's in this system including moons."

****January 07****th**** Alpha Base 13:00 Hours.****

Well you currently couldn't have asked for a more beautiful location, at least scenery wise. The Base was located in a valley a lake was on one side feed by a water fall that came out of the mountains, and through the center of the valley ran a river feed by the lake, altogether a very relaxing location. A few of the marines that liked fishing also found that the lake and river were bountiful with alien fish.

I looked down from my location on the mountain side and watched as the Marine and Navy engineers began constructing a motor pool for the base and as others set up hangers to store the different vehicles we had acquired during several salvage missions. Watch towers were also being erected and four Onager cannons had been set up in concealed locations to protect the base from attack, not that we were too worried about that, but you can never be too careful.

Just then my com buzzed.

"_Noble 5 you are to report back to base immediately we have a condition red."_

"Base what the hell happened?" I asked alarmed, could the covenant have found out about us.

"_A small fleet just came out of hyperspace on the edge of the system."_

"Crap!"

9. Chapter 08

****Chapter 08. ****

****GRS **_**Casta**_**.**

Aubrie through herself down on her bunk and closed her eyes to try and get a few moments of sleep, before something of importance called her away.

Ever since they had left Cloud City, Aubrie and her crew had been desperately trying to stay one step ahead of the Covenant. She had thought that Hutt space would be safe, however though the Hutt's were a neutral party. The Covenant still sent ships into Hutt territory to hunt down human ships. The Hutt's didn't like it. It was bad for business after all, but they didn't want to piss off the Covenant so they did nothing.

Aubrie now found herself in command of a small ragtag fleet. It was primarily made up of human refugee ships, but there were a few Republic vessels that like her ship were trapped behind the Covenant's lines. Still they had nothing that could really challenge any Covenant vessel above a corvette. Altogether they could take on a

frigate or a destroyer and maybe if they were lucky a light cruiser, but that was just one ship. The Covenant never went anywhere without at least two ships.

Aubrie got up and looked over a holo of the local star cluster and then expanded it. Time was running out. The fleet couldn't afford to lose any more ships and if they fought the Covenant again they would lose a lot of ships. Aubrie needed to find a way round the Covenant lines back to Republic space, but that would mean looking for a new hyperspace rout. Aubrie examined the map; she zoomed in to where her fleet was. She sighed, the stars in this area were very dense, and that would make trying to find a new rout very dangerous.

****GRS _Casta_ three Days Later.****

"Mam we have a ship on long-range sensors it's leaving orbit of the second planet and has plotted an intercept course with the fleet."

"Can you identify it?" Aubrie asked with concern. Could the Covenant already be her she wondered.

"Not at this range, it will be a minute before we can get a positive ID." The clone informed her. the seconds ticked by, Aubrie didn't realis she had been holding her breath till the sensors officer called again.

"Mam we have a positive ID, it's the _Texas Ranger_."

"Thank the Force it's not Covenant, but what is the _Texas_ doing out here?" Aubrie exclaimed with relief.

"Well you will probably get the chance to ask them, they are hailing us." The comms officer informed her.

"_Commander Wyn I am surprised to see you out here, though the reason is easily guessed."
>

"Captain Foster it's good to see you again. And I am as surprised to see you out here as you are to see us. I am just glad you are not Covenant."

"_As I am that you are not." _Captain Foster replied with a smile.
"However your presence here presents us with a problem."

"How's that Captain?"

"_This location is top secret and cannot be allowed to be discovered by the Covenant. I am afraid I am going to have to insist that your fleet remains here until further notes"_

"Captain Foster I don't understand. What are you doing here?"

"_Commander, why don't you have your fleet move into orbit of the third planet. Then come to the Texas, there is much we need to discuss."_

****UNSC **_**Texas Ranger**_** Conference Room.****

"Captain Foster, can you please explain to me why my fleet can't leave?" Aubrie asks as she takes a seat.

"It's a simple problem of security Commander. We must insure this location stays classified and that our presence in this part of the galaxy is kept from the Covenant." Foster explained. "I am sorry but I can't risk that there might be a spy on one of your ships."

"That's ridiculous Captain! Everyone in my fleet has been running for their lives."

"Commander if everyone in your fleet was human I might believe that, but that's not the case is it!" Foster points out.

"Fine!" Aubrie huffed. "Then I must ask by what authority, do you presume to keep my fleet here."

"By the authority given to me by the UEG and UNSC, of which this is now sovereign territory."

Aubrie's mouth dropped open for a moment. "You can't be serious!" She exclaims.

"I am very serious Commander. We claimed this system for the UEG yesterday, and I must inform you that any ships trying to leave this system without my permission, will be stopped by any means necessary."

"Captain Foster, why are you doing this?"

Foster takes a long breath before assuring. "Miss Wyn we are not from this part of the galaxy, and my people have been fighting the Covenant far longer than you have."

"How long?" Aubrie interrupts Foster.

"Nearly three decades." Foster replies solemnly. Aubrie couldn't hide the look of shock on her face.

"They attacked one of our outlying colony's claiming our destruction was the will of their gods. Since then we have lost hundreds of colonies and billions of lives to the Covenant." Foster paused for a moment to let what he had just said sink in.

"So you have no idea why humans are an affront to the Covenants gods?"

"No."

"Can you help us with this war?"

"Have you not heard what I just told you?" Foster exclaimed. "We have been fighting the Covenant for nearly thirty years. Our fleet is a mere shadow of what it once was and we only have our core worlds left. To top it off you are more technologically advanced than we are. We have only just begun equipping ships with shields, and energy weapons are still down the road."

"But surly it is in your best interests to help us?" Aubrie asks.

"Miss Wyn it is in our best interests not to draw attention to ourselves. If the Covenant were to resume their campaign against us, it is estimated they would effectively neutralized us within six months and maybe another year before they completely eradicated us."

"Then what are you doing here?"

"We are keeping an eye on the Covenants activities. We may not be able to do anything about them now, but it would be foolish to not keep ourselves informed about what they are doing." Foster explains.

Aubrie looks at the floor. "If you won't let my fleet leave than what are we supposed to do?"

"There are two inhabitable worlds in this system. We have set up an outpost on the one we are currently orbiting. You could have your fleet set up a refugee cam on the second planet." Foster suggests.

****March 15****th**** 2553 08:00 Hours Alpha Rendezvous Sight.****

I stared at my Longsword's sensors. I had been sitting in this asteroid belt for the past six hours. After much persuasion by Commander Wyn, Captain Foster had finely agreed to allow refugees into what we were now calling The New Hope system. However Foster was not just giving the nave data to people.

Instead Commander Wyn would find a group of refugees and then give them a time and place to meet someone from Ranger. That someone turned out to be, nine times out of ten Six or myself.

I leaned back and relaxed. When we had first establish the bass at New Hope and Commander Wyn had set up her refugee camp, things had been rather tight supply wise, but then the Westward Bound arrived a month and half later. A refit Phoenix class colony ship she could carry huge amounts of supply's and personnel, and thus our supply problems were solved, at least for the time being.

"Rachel wasn't that transport supposed to be here two hours ago"

"Two hours, five minutes, twenty-seven seconds to be exact."

"I wish Commander Wyn would stress to these people that the need to be on time." I growled irritably.

"Noble 5 I am picking up a ship coming out of hyperspace."

"Good they are finely here." Just then a very large ship came out a hyperspace nearly on top of us.

"What the hell!" I exclaimed as I took the controls of the Longsword.

"Lieutenant, that's a Recusant-class light destroyer. We need to get

out of here NOW!"

"I can see that Rachel, prepping hyperdrive." I said as my hands flew over the controls.

"They have locked on to us with a tractor beam." Rachel informed me.

"Damn they must have known we would be here."

****CIS **_**Death Wing**_**. ****

"What do you think we will find on board?" A B1 battle droid asked another B1 marching next to him as they took up position behind the craft that had just been brought on board.

"I don't know, but I hope it's not a Jedi."

"Jedi, who said anything about a Jedi?" another B1 asked.

"Shut up, there are no Jedi on the ship." A B1 with the yellow markings of a Commander ordered.

Once all the droids were in place they stood and waited weapons pointed at the ships exit ramp. A minute later the ramp slowly opened.

"Come out with your hand up." The Commander ordered.

"Ya or we will blast you." An enthusiastic B1 added. About thirty seconds went by and then three green spheres came hurling out of the fighter. One of them landed by a B1's feet it looked at the ground

"Uh Oh!" It said before the frags detonated and decimated the formation.

"That's a lot of scrap metal." Rachel remarked upon seeing my handy work as I exited the Longsword.

"And there is going to be a lot more before this day is over." I replied.

****Twenty Minutes Later.****

The Blast doors slowly opened, their controls having been overridden by a powerful AI. Security droids stand weapons ready waiting for a target to appear. The doors open, a blur of green dashes through, the droids open fire, red blaster bolts fill the air, the crack of an M6G is heard over the wail of the blasters, and the blue flashes of an energy sword cut down anything in its path. A moment later the hallway is clear of droids and all that remains is a green armored soldier.

"He is still coming." Captain Durgas exclaimed. "How is that possible? There were two droidekas with those security droids, not even a Jedi can stand against droidekas."

Major Nihai 'Taham stood with his arms crossed watching the video feed from the security monitors. "He is a Demon, they call themselves

Spartans. They are the most skilled warriors my people have ever faced. Your Jedi are skilled combatants, but they are not dedicated warriors willing to do anything to defeat their enemy."

"You sound like you admire them." Durgas replies.

"Any honorable warrior should give respect to those who deserve it, whether they are friend or foe. Though these Demons are our enemy they have earned our respect."

"Well the only thing standing between this Demon and us is your soldiers. I hope they fair better than my droids."

Nihai simply grunted in response. How could this pathetic creature compare his team to droids?

****Last Blast Door Before Ships Bridge.****

"There you go just one more to go after this." Rachel said as she unlocked the door.

"Good this is getting ridiculous." I remarked irritably.

"I thought you would be happy spending your day destroying things."

"Oh I am quite happy to destroy things. I am just getting tired of all these stupid droids. It gets old after a while."

"Well this will cheer you up I just used the security cams to take a peek at what is on the other side of this door. Looks like you have some old friends guarding the bridge."

"Who many?"

"Two Elite minors with sporting Grunts and Jackals." She replied calmly.

"Is that all? I'm insulted."

"Now don't go getting too cocky." Rachel scolded.

"Yes mother!" I teased. There wasn't any more time for fooling around though the doors opened and the fighting commenced.

The Elites immediately opened fire, the grunts lobbed plasma grenades, and one jackal managed to get a shot off before I had made it through the door and had taken cover. However I didn't stay in cover very long. Rolling out of my previous position I threw a frag at the enemy formation and took cover again as a hail of plasma scorched the deck where I had just been. I quickly capitalized on the distraction my grenade had caused. I drew my M6 and nailed three Grunts before they could take cover, and was gratified to see I had gotten two Grunts and a Jackal with my grenade before I ducked back in to cover. I then took my shotgun and charged the nearest Elite, I waited till I was close enough for max effectiveness and then let him have it in the face. I spun around his falling corps and blasted the second Jackal, and another Grunt. The second Elite came at me with his sword; I blocked it with my shotgun. Throwing away the now useless weapon I drew one of my energy swords and slammed it into his gut and

then activated it, running the bastard through. Throwing the Elites now limp body away I drew my pistol and shot the remaining Grunts trying to run away.

****CIS **_**Death Wing**_** Bridge.****

"I dead for sure this time." Captain Durgas whimpered. "If you save me I will reward you handsomely."

"I have had enough of you!" Nihai snapped angrily drawing his plasma pistol. "You don't deserve the honor of dying at the hands of the Demon. Besides I have been waiting for the moment that I could pursuantly dispose of your worthless ass." Nihai then shoots the stunned Captain in the chest with a charged blast.

Nihai 'Taham then turned to face the bride entrance as the blast doors began to open; he raised his sword and got into a combat stance and waited for the Demon to come.

The doors opened and revealed his opponent, a Demon clad in green armor with a blue stripe running down the middle of its helmet, and a blue right shoulder guard. He charges the Demon, the Demon fires an assault rifle at him, but he sidesteps. He swings at the Demon's head, but the Demon ducks and steps to the side dropping the gun and drawing a sword of his own in one hand and a pistol in the other.

Nihai charges again, this time his strike is blocked by the Demon using his sword. The Demon hits Nihai across the face with his pistol before they break away. Nihai is temporally stunned and feels three projectiles slam into his shield. Nihai takes another sword from his belt. He usually didn't fight with two swords, but this Demon was a special case.

Nihai charged, he swung with his right, and then jabbed with his left, but the Demon parried each strike. Nihai launched a more complex strike at the Demon, but still the Demon blocked him. Howling the fight went on Nihai didn't know, however he did know it ended quickly. Nihai must have slowed down for a moment because he suddenly found himself flying across the room with a dent in the shape of the Demons boot imbedded in his chest plate. He hit the bridge viewport with a thud and Nihai thought he heard it crack. A split second after that he heard the crack of a human sidearm. The viewport shattered and Nihai was sucked out into the cold of space before the emergency shutters could slam shut.

"Well done Demon. It seems the stories were true. My you die with honor." Nihai 'Taham said before he died.

"Well that was a good fight." I said as I let Rachel access the ships primary AI core so that she could wrestle control from the ship's AI pilot. A moment later she appears on the bridges holo projector.

"Well I am glad that you at least found a good challenge today. Because tacking out that pathetic excuse for an AI was no challenge at all."

"Well don't be too upset we just acquired a new ship."

"Do you want me to set course for New Hope?" Rachel asked.

"Do it." I said as I sat in the command chair.

"Course set in Lieutenant."

"Engage!" I commanded Rachel.

"Really!" Rachel said as she turned to look at me.

"What? That show is a classic."

10. Chapter 09

****Chapter 09. ****

****March 29****th**** 2553 08:00 Hours New Hope System Second planet
UNSC Alpha Base.****

Jedi Master Balfin Qwan strolled through what the UNSC personnel called alpha base. Qwan had arrived at New Hope three weeks ago when padawan Wyn had found his damaged cruiser, and had sent him to meet the UNSC contact that gave his ship the nave data to get here.

Qwan watched as a formation of UNSC solders ran past singing out a cadence as they ran. Qwan had taken command of the Republic forces that were taking refuge in this system when he had arrived. Wyn had tried to bring him up to speed on everything, but something's he just had to see for himself.

Qwan was intrigued by what he saw here at the UNSC base. The Republic hadn't had a full-scale military force since the New Sith War almost a thousand years ago. There hadn't been any need for it the Jedi kept the peace and each planet had their own defense force. Qwan side, a thousand years of relative peace sounded like a good thing, but now the galaxy was paying dearly for it. Because there had been no major conflicts the galaxy had been lulled into a sense of false security. No one saw the need to keep spending credits on troops and ships that weren't needed. That sentiment had nearly been the down fall of the Republic when the CIS went to war with the Republic. Ironically the fact that the Republic was fighting what was essentially a civil war had actually saved it. If the Covenant had attacked sooner the Republic would have been defenseless.

Qwan looked up as a flight of Sparrowhawks flew overhead. The UNSC's vehicles versatility and speed put the Republic to shame. Qwan had watched as the UNSC troops had executed a training exercise a few days ago. He had been impressed at how fast the UNSC could move its forces to engage an enemy. The Republic was hindered by the fact that other than there LAAT's the Republics vehicles were mostly walkers incapable of the speed of weald, tracked, and repulsor driven vehicles.

Master Qwan continued his walk towards where he was told the Spartans barracks was located. Qwan had heard a lot about these Spartans. He had been told that there were six of the super solders here and that they routinely trained in hand to hand combat at about this hour outside their barracks. And after hearing that a lone Spartan had captured a CIS destroyer, he had to see these soldiers for

himself.

Qwan arrived at the Spartan barracks just as they were finishing their warm-ups. Qwan found an out of the way place with a good view and got comfortable.

Master Qwan watched the Spartans spar for two hours. During that time he had seen them practice with just their bodies, knives, poles, practice swords, and with a practice weapon that looked like the swords the quad mouths used. He was amazed, the Spartans moved with a speed and precision that Qwan had believed only the oldest and greatest Jedi Masters were capable of.

Qwan got up and began walking towards the UNSC Command and Control building. He had a meeting with Captain Foster in half an hour and it never looked good to military types to be late. Qwan arrived to find Captain Foster and Colonel Main examining something on a holo table.

"Good morning General Qwan." Foster greeted Qwan as he looked up.

"Captain, Colonel." Qwan greeted the two officers. "What was it you wanted to see me about?"

"This." Captain Foster said entering a command into the holo table. An image then appeared above the table. The image was of Commander Wyn with it was information on her and her ship were she and her ship were last seen and a reward for her apprehension dead or alive.

Qwan studied the poster for a moment before replying. "It seems Commander Wyn has gained the attention of the Covenant command."

"It would look that way, and that's why we need her to ease her activity's for a while." Foster said. "The Covenant are starting to get wise to what she is doing. If she continues it will put at risk our operations, your people, and the refugees."

"Very well Captain I will tell Commander Wyn to halt her activities for the time being. Was there anything else?"

"Yes we just got word from our Command. They have decided to send an expeditionary force."

"And what will this expeditionary force consist of if I may ask?" Qwan hoped against hope that the UNSC had decided to send a force that would turn the tide in favor of the Republic.

"Command can only spar one carrier, three cruisers, eight destroyers, twelve frigates, and a number of fleet auxiliaries." Foster told Qwan, he neglected to mention that they were the only ships the UNSC had equipped with the new slipstream drive and thus the only ships that could make it here in any reasonable time.

Qwan couldn't help looking disappointed. "That's not even enough ships to challenge a Covenant raiding party."

"We are aware of that General, but our fleet has taken tremendous losses over the course of this war. Command is being generous in sending three cruisers let alone a carrier." Foster insisted.

"Also coming along for the ride are two marine divisions." Colonel Main added. "Including the marines already stationed on the combat ships, we will have a ground force over fifty thousand strong."

Qwan frowned. "How do you intend to fight the Covenant with such a small force?"

"We don't." Foster said bluntly. "Fleet Admiral Hood himself has gone over our reports to FLEETCOM in great detail. Our orders are to attempt to organize what human forces still exist in the outer rim and form them into an effective fighting force. Then we are to stall the Covenant as long as we can and pray that the Republic and UNSC can piece themselves back together and go on the offensive."

Qwan just stared at Foster as if he was mad. "You intend to hold off the Covenant using essentially the tatters of what's left of planetary defense forces?"

"Pretty much." Main confirmed.

"You are either mad or beyond desperate." Qwan said. He tried to read their emotions through the force, but like every time before he got nothing

"It's probably a bit of both General." Foster replied with a smile.

****14:00 Hours New Hope System Third Planet Jedi Enclave.****

Aubrie Wyn sat in the Jedi enclave courtyard meditating. The enclave was set up outside the refugee camp, if it could be called a camp. There were now so many refugees that the camp had become a small city.

Jedi Master Balfin Qwan had the enclave built because he believed the Jedi that had found refuge here needed some place to gather and escape from the world for a while. And since a large number of them were padawans it provided a good place for them to continue their training.

Wyn looked up from her meditation as Master Qwan entered the courtyard. "Did everything go well Master?" Wyn inquired. Qwan sat down on the edge of the pool that was in the center of the courtyard and fed by a natural spring.

"They want you to stop going out to rescue refugees." Qwan said with a sigh.

"What!" Wyn exclaimed. "How can they ask me to do that? They better than anyone should know what will happen to those refugees if I don't."

"Wyn the Covenant have a bounty out on you, and then there is that incident a few weeks ago. Captain Foster thinks it's too risky right now and I have to agree. So until further notice you are to remain here."

"Fine." Wyn grumbled. "Was there anything else?"

"They are sending a fleet here." Qwan said as he looked out towards the mountains that were visible in the distance. Wyn's face brightened with excitement. "Don't get too excited." Qwan said. "They're not sending that many ships. It's pretty much just three cruisers a carrier and their escorts." Qwan then went on to explain the UNSC's plan for the outer rim.

"By the Force their insane!" Wyn said in disbelief after Master Qwan had informed her of what Foster had told him. "The outer rim worlds would be crushed by the Covenant even if they were organized."

"That's what I thought at first, but I had some time to think about it on the way back. If they can get enough ships, repair and refit them, retrain the crews, and keep this bases location a secret they might have a chance."

"Are we going to join them in this mission?" Wyn asked.

"I didn't want to at first. Our mission has been to try and get back to the Republic, but I have begun to think that if Captain Foster can make this work than we might do more good here than back in Republic space." Qwan then looked at Wyn. "Then there are the UNSC personnel themselves. What did they tell us to call them Terrans?" Wyn nodded informing Qwan he was right. "I am sure you have felt it. These Terrans don't exist in the force like the rest of us. They are like rocks in a stream; the Force just seems to flow around them."

"While everyone else in the galaxy are like sponges some less so and other more so." Wyn concluded.

Qwan smiled. "The Counsel was right about you. If you are not made a knight by the time we return I will be surprised." Qwan then got up and began to walk into the Enclave with Wyn following beside him. "I want to understand why they are different and we need to know if it is natural or a result of something else."

****April 16****th**** 10:45 Hours** **Geonosis System Modified
Longsword.****

I sat in the copilot's seat of the longsword with my arms crossed and my chin resting on my chest plate trying to get some sleep. Next to me sat Six in the pilots chair keeping an eye on the display, and behind us paced Commander Wyn.

"Would you relax Commander. Your pacing isn't going to get us there any faster." I said to her tiredly. She had been on edge ever since we had entered the system.

"Commander you should try and get some sleep." Six said. "It will be several hours before we arrive." Wyn sat down and tried to relax, but didn't seem to be having much success. Truth be told I was a little on edge myself. Jumping into a heavily occupied enemy system didn't strike me as a good idea. Sure I had done my share of suicide ops, but this was on a completely different level. Captain wanted us to go though, so we went and if Wyn's intel was good we couldn't afford not to go. I pulled up the mission data on my HUD and reviewed it one more time.

The Covenant had a prison camp on Geonosis where they were keeping

Jedi prisoners, and apparently the Covenant were trying to turn these Jedi to what Wyn called the dark side and get them to fight for them. The Covenant was also keeping the human Jedi alive to test the loyalty of the non-human Jedi they turned by making them kill the human Jedi.

I looked out my viewport toward the scene of the last battle in this system and not far from that sat the massive Covenant station and its defense fleet. Thankfully the fleet was smaller now than when the Republic attacked a good portion of it off chasing the Republic fleet.

I turned my attention back to the mission and began reviewing the Republic files on the area the Jedi were being held. Apparently the Covenant were keeping the Jedi in one of the holding areas of the Petranaki arena, which happened to be the sight of the first battle between the Republic and Separatists. Because of this the Republic had very detailed records of this area. Most of the arenas facility's like holding cells were located underground while the arena its self was above ground and looked like any other sports arena, only it was built into what looked like a termite mound. Getting in would be fairly easy, but getting out with the Jedi prisoners would be difficult. There was a ground side ship docks not far away, but it was still too far to get everyone to in time. So while Commander Wyn and Six tried to free the prisoners Rachel and I were going to try and acquire a ride.

****17:38 Hours** **Geonosis.****

"Ghost one this is Ghost two do you read me?"

"_Roger Ghost two I read you."_

"I have eyes on the objective. Not a lot of options, but I think I have a candidate. Don't move until I have confirmed we have what we need."

"_Roger that Ghost two we will sit tight till you're ready."_

I continued examining the Docks for a few more minutes' before I began making my way down to them. I activated my active camouflage and deactivated my shields so that I wouldn't have to worry about the cloaks capacitors running out of juice. It was a risk, but stealth was more important than my shields and Rachel could switch my shields back on in an instant.

"I would recommend that we commandeer that Munificent-class frigate." Rachel suggested.

"I was thinking the Providence-class destroyer looks to be a more attractive target. If we get it back in one piece it will greatly add to the fleet's fire power."

"It is also considerably larger and we need to bring it in near the arena so we can pick up the prisoners. The Munificent-class is better suited to that task. "

"Alright the Munificent frigate it is then."

It took me about an hour to get down to the docks and then another

half hour to make my way through the docks security to the ship I wanted. Then I had to get in to said ship, that I didn't manage to do without tripping a few alarms.

"Ghost one this is Ghost two I am in." I said over the com as I closed the ships hatch behind me. "You had better hurry and get those prisoners. I should have this crate airborne in twenty, then maybe another five ten minutes to get to your location. Be ready to go when I get there I don't want to be sitting too long."

"_Roger that Ghost two. We are on the move, sending you location for pickup now. See you there."_

19:08 Hours.

"Alright we are moving." Six said as he stood up and made to leave the little side room he and the Commander had been hiding in.

"Did Five find a ship we can use?" Wyn asked.

"Yes." Six replied. _"He wouldn't have called me otherwise."_ Six added to himself. They made their way deeper into what Six felt was best described as an ants nest. Six had reconned their path a while earlier while they had waited for Five's call. Six was glad he had done that, as Commander Wyn did not have an active camouflage unit. Now he knew where all the sentries were placed and where they would be at what times, allowing them to avoid any unwanted attention. Of course that wasn't going to last. Security around the location where the Jedi were being held was good, Six had to admit that and given that they didn't have a lot of time they had to move fast.

Six poked a fiber optic probe around the wall to get the number and location of the sentry's in the guard room.

"How many?" Wyn whispered. Six held up his fingers to indicate four and before she could ask anything else he dashed around the corner. Almost instantly after that there was the report of four blaster shots and the sound of four bodies' hitting the ground. Six then appeared round the corner again and motioned for her to follow. Wyn glanced at the bodies of the Geonosians as she passed and noticed how Six had hit each one perfectly between the eye. Before exiting the room Six walked over to the guard's computer console and set a small device on it there was a small spark and Six picked it up. The device had transmitted a virus into the Geonosians computers. It would scrub any of the security footage that had images of the Spartans in it and replace it with Republic Commandos.

They traveled down a corridor and then entered another room that only had one guard in it, which Six dispatched with ease. The room appeared to be the guard's armory. Six grabbed a few blasters and then handed several to Wyn. Wyn didn't like Blasters, but she realized what Six was doing. The prisoners were going to need something to defend themselves with. They left that room and came to the entrance to the main holding area. Six again examined the room using his probe. The room had ten guards he could see, but his motion tracker was telling him there were twenty. The Jedi were being held in cells using force fields as doors. The cells lined each wall and were stacked in two levels. Six guessed there were ten guards on the ground level and ten on the cat walk.

Six turned to Wyn and was about to give her instructions using hand motions, but then remembered that she wasn't a Spartan or a marine and wouldn't have a clue as to what he wanted her to do. "I am going to go in and engage the hostiles." He said giving her the blasters he had picked up. "You wait thirty seconds and then come in and start releasing your people." Wyn simply nodded in acknowledgment. Just then alarms started sounding throughout the facility. Six hung his head. _"Just my luck. Well nothing I can do about it now."_ Six thought as he raised his two DC-15s blasters and prepared to charge into the room, he had to act fast.

****20:30 Hours.****

I angrily hit the override on the alarm that was flashing next to the pilot's station that I now occupied, the remains of a droid pilot lying on the deck behind me.

"Rachel I would really appreciate it if you would do something about those guns emplacements." I shouted as another warning popped up on the view screen at the front of the bridge.

"Turbolaser batteries targeted firing nowâ€¦ Targets have been eliminated Lieutenant." Rachel said calmly.

"Thank you Rachelâ€¦ And it looks like they have scrambled fighters." I huffed in frustration.

"I saw that exactly forty-six seconds ago. I am already bringing point defense guns online now."

"Okay I get it you have things under control." I said as I swung the frigate to starboard to avoid a spire.

"Do you want me to drive?" Rachel asked.

"No!" I exclaimed there was no way I was going to let an AI fly for me in a combat zone while I was quite capable of doing it myself. "Just take care of anything trying to shoot us."

****20:31 Hours.****

Six ran down a corridor as the far end was ripped apart by C-12 and came crashing down. Six turned to examine his handy work before continuing on his way. He entered the main room of the spite that was designated at the pickup point. Six could see on his motion tracker that Wyn and the liberated Jedi had already started climbing the stairs to the top of the spire. Six could also see the hordes of bugs coming from every nook and cranny in the place.

Noble Six took a deep breath and readied his blasters. _"Alfred better not be late."_ He thought to himself. Six took off running to catch-up with the main group blasting anything that got in his way. When he reached the top several of the prisoners with blaster nearly blow him away, but luckily he was fast enough and Wyn was as well that the situation didn't last more than a few seconds.

Six planted C-12 charges on the appropriate wall and had every one stand back as he blow their exit. After the smoke had cleared he approached the hole as saw a ship approaching the spire, and not a moment too soon. Six turned as he heard a shout he ran back to fined

swarms of bugs slowly but surely making their way up the stars. Six tossed three frags to slow them down and then approached Commander Wyn.

"Get these prisoners on the ship. I will bring up the flank." Six said.

Wyn didn't reply she just nodded and immediately began giving out instructions to organize the liberated Jedi so that boarding would be as fast as possible. A moment later the Munificent Star Frigate came alongside the tower lining it's airlock up perfectly. The airlock opened and the liberated Jedi poured on. _"Ladies and gentlemen"_ A voice sounded over the intercom. _"I am Rachel and I will be your chief flight attendant. On behalf of acting Captain Noble Five and the entire crew, welcome aboard Spartan Spaceways flight one, non-stop service from Geonosis to New Hope._

Our flight time will be of ten hours.

At this time, make sure your seat backs and tray tables are in their full upright position. Also make sure your seat belt is correctly fastened. Also, we advise you that as of this moment, any electronic equipment must be turned off. Thank you."

Six slowly walked backwards firing his blaster pistols into the crowd of Geonosians, his DC-15Ss having already run dry. Just as he was about to step onto the ship he was hit by a blast from a Geonosians sonic blaster and sent flying back into the ships airlock, the airlock then slammed shut and the frigate accelerated at full speed for open space.

Wyn's eyes went wide when she saw Noble six get hit. She rushed to his side and tried to assess if he had been hurt or not. She could see sparking around his armor, but she guessed that was from his armors energy shields. Six began to move and Wyn tried to help prop him up against the bulkhead, though considering how much Six waded in his armor Wyn realized it was more of a gesture of help than actual help. Six then reached up and removed his helmet.

"Damn those things pack a punch!" He said as he gasped for air, as he had had the wind knocked out of him.

"Are you alright?" Wyn asked concern evident in her voice.

"Ya I am fine, nothing I can't walk off." Six replied as he looked at her with a smile. _"She has pretty eyes." _Six thought to himself.

11. Chapter 10

**Chapter 10. **

April 06**th**** 2553 10:00 Hours New Hope System.**

Aubrie Wyn sat in her command char with her chin resting on her fist. _"His eyes such a rich blue!"_ she thought to herself. _"They had so much life in them, yet at the same time they seemed to have seen more death and destruction than any one person should see. I could see the pain and sorrow that lay deep within. I feel sorry for him, I just

want to hug him and tell him everything will be alright" _Aubrie shook her head, why was she thinking like that. Her mined had drifted back to the Spartan every one called Six, ever since she had seen him hit by that sonic blast back on Geonosis.

"Mam we have an incoming slipspace rupture." The clone at the sensor station informed her.

"That must be the UNSC fleet." Aubrie said straitening herself and assuming a more professional poster. A moment later thirty-two vessels came out of slipspace. Aubrie quickly picked out the three cruisers, as they were the lead ships in the formation and one looked just like the _Texas_ while the other two fallowed a different, but similar design. Then came the frigates, destroyers, and carrier, and after them the auxiliaries.

Aubrie was impressed by the UNSC designs. Even though there weren't all that many of them the UNSC ships still managed to portray a sense of power. Foster had told her that they needed three to one odds to fight the Covenant, but if one was simply going by looks a UNSC cruiser should be able to take on three Covenant cruisers no problem. But that just goes to show looks aren't everything.

"If the UNSC contact us let me know. I will be in my quarters meditating." Wyn said as she got up from her seat.

"Yes Commander."

Wyn then left the bridge and headed for her room. Once there she tried to meditate, but her mined would wander always leading back to Noble Six. Wyn opened her eyes she wondered why she couldn't seem to concentrate, why she seemed to be always thinking about the gray armored Spartan. Maybe it was the Force trying to tell her something. Wyn closed her eyes again and just let go. This time the force seemed to take her from her ship and transport her at incredible speed through space to the UNSC's Alpha Base, then into the mountains surrounding it, and then to a lone hole in the force. Terrans were not like everyone ells in the galaxy. The force seamed to flow around the Terrans as if it was trying to avoid them or couldn't penetrate them, but each Terran made only a little hole in the force, almost unnoticeable if you weren't paying attention.

Other times Wyn had tried to see the Terrans through the force all she had seen were indistinguishable blobs. This time she saw a man or at least the shadow of a man standing on the mountainside looking down into the valley below. Wyn felt sure it was Noble Six she didn't know why, but she reached out to touch his shoulder. Just as she did the shadow turned and seamed to look at her. At that moment the shadows eyes became visible. The same rich blue eye Six had looked at her with.

Suddenly Aubrie was swept away arose the galaxy. She found herself standing on a planet a small boy was playing in front of a house. Then there was a strange noise from the sky, the boy looked up to see Covenant ships descending on the planet. A young woman runs out of the house and grabs the boy and runs back inside with him. Whyn realizes then what she is witnessing this wasn't for her to see she was intruding where she didn't belong. She tried to leave but found she couldn't.

Wyn didn't know how long it took it seemed like a life time, but she saw everything or at least the highlights anyway. She saw Marines trying to evacuate the civilians, the boy and his family included. She saw the Covenant attack and overwhelm the marines, she saw the boy's father and other civilians pick up the weapons of fallen Marines and help fight the Covenant. Wyn saw a quad jaw kill his father with an energy sword, and she watched as his mother shielded her son from a needler round. She watched as a Marine picked up the crying boy and ran with him as fast as he could for a drop ship that was touching down. She saw the Marine hit several times by plasma bolts, but he never stopped running till he had handed the boy to a crew man on the drop ship.

She then saw the boy seated in a room with a table and two chars. She could feel the pain and grief that was emanating from him, but more than that she could feel the hatred, hatred for the Covenant. There was a Man in a black uniform seated at the table across from the boy. The man offered the boy a way to get back at the Covenant, away to hurt them, and the boy accepted. She watched as the boy then trained with other children to be a soldier, as he was augmented to be a super soldier, and she watched him go on to fight the Covenant. Then everything else came as a blur the death, the destruction, the colony's burned. Aubrie's eyes shot open and she leapt to her feet with a start.

****Jedi Enclave.****

The Jedi Enclave council chamber or at least what served as the counsel chamber was a buzz of activity. With all the newly liberated Masters finely brought up to speed about what had happened while they were incarcerated. There was now a lot of talk about what should now be done and in some cases actual heated debate.

After hours of talk there three main groups had emerged. One wanted to make a run for Republic space the Covenant blockades be damned. The other group wanted to take what forces they had and use hit and run tactic against the Covenant. Then the last and by far the smallest thought it a good idea to stay and help the Terrans.

General Pong Krell was the strongest voice for making a brake for Republic space. Balfin Qwan wasn't surprised really, Krell was a by the book commander. That wasn't a bad think but it meant that he had a hard time excepting new ideas. Aayla Secura on the other hand was the loudest voice for leaving this system and go after the Covenant using hit and run attacks, and Shaak Ti was also was also baking her. Qwan on the other hand was the loudest voice for staying and helping the UNSC. Unfortunately he did not have the standing that the other Masters did, but he did have the backing of Master Fay, and Ima-Gun.

"We simply do not have the ships or the fire power to break through the Covenant blockades. It would worse than suicide to try it would be madness." One master pointed out.

"And what would you have use do? Slink around behind Covenant lines slowly being whittled down until we are nothing?" Another shot back.

"All these points are mute." Someone else pointed out. "The Terrans

have threatened to stop any ship attempting to leave the system without their perdition, and they have the ships to back it up."

"So what they rescued us only to make us prisoners again?" someone asked.

"They have good reason to not want anyone to leave this system, look what they are doing here. The last thing they need is the Covenant learning of this place." Master Ima-Gun pointed out calmly.

"That may be, but we have a duty to try and return to Republic space." Krell returned.

"Have you not been listening?" Secura nearly yelled at him exasperated. "We won't survive trying to run the Covenant blockade."

"Enough!" Jedi Master Fay said as she rose from her seat. Fay was distinguished by her pale skin, blond hair, and her pointy ears. She also had distinctive tattoos on her left cheek and forehead. She appeared to be a beautiful twenty-year-old, but that was deceptive as she was really over a century old. Her response was not loud or harsh or even stern. It was almost like a loving mother speaking to her children. "We cannot hope break through the Covenant lines with the few ships we have, and we cannot hope do any noticeable damage if we attack. The UNSC has granted us safe harbor here and if we are patient and wait for when they are ready they may aid us in harassing the Covenant. In any event it will not hurt us any to stay and mend our damaged ships and wait for a more advantageous moment to head for Republic space."

After Master Fay's intervention things calmed down and it was decided, if somewhat grudgingly that they would remain in the New Hope system.

****April 09th 2553 08:00 Hours New Hope System UNSC **_**Spirit of Fire.**_**

Rear Admiral James Gregory Cutter sat in his command chair on the bridge of the UNSC _Spirit of Fire_ going over reports and signing off on orders. Cutter had never wanted to be an admiral simply for this reason, paper work! It might be digitalized now, but it was still paper work when it was all said and done.

Cutter had initially tried to turn the promotion down, but the UNSC was desperate for experienced officers and with his wife dead there was nothing left keeping him at home. Cutter had finally accepted the promotion with the condition that he was allowed to retain command of the _Spirit of Fire_. Command had originally balked at the idea, but Fleet Admiral Hood sided with it, so after some major refits he was given back command of the _Spirit_.

Cutter was now in command of a taskforce with probably the most complicated mission of all time. His orders were to establish a base of operations in this new region of the galaxy. He was also to insure that the Covenant was bogged down in this sector of the Galaxy long enough for the UNSC to recover and implement the new technology that was being developed. He was also supposed to try and make contact with this Republic and try to establish an alliance. The flip side of all that was he wasn't supposed to do anything that could bring

the Covenant back knocking on the UNSC's door.

Cutter brought up the report from the auxiliaries on to his display. The mining ships were already at work harvesting resources to supply the refinery and fabrication ships which would in turn supply the two Cradle-class fleet repair ships. The UNSC _Tender Care_ and UNSC _Jiffy Lube_ were already helping to patch up several of the badly damaged Republic vessels. Some of their systems were not compatible with the Republic's, but they could at least provide a safe location for crews to preform EVA work and get some of the major hull breaches repaired.

After reviewing those reports and signing relating paper work. Cutter pulled up reports from the scientists, technicians, and engineers that command sent along. They had been literally drooling all over the things that the _Texas_ had recovered and Cutter was surprised they had actually put together a report so soon.

****April 20th 2553 14:00 Hours New Hope System Planet Harmony.****

Padawan Zule Xiss ran through the woods as fast as her legs and the force could take her. Zule heard the report of a rifle and saw the impact of the round on a tree in front of her. Zule was suddenly grabbed and pulled behind a large bolder as another round passed through the air where she had once been.

"Get down!" Aubrie Wyn hissed.

"This is insane!" Zule exclaimed. Zule Xiss was a female Falleen, she had brown hair, green eyes, and orange skin. She also had a prosthetic left arm, a souvenir from a duel with a Sith assassin.

"What the hell was Krell thinking? He should have known a frontal assault on that position was useless. And then those soldiers that dropped in from orbit that was new."

"I have no idea." Wyn said as a clone that was taking cover not far from them was hit while he tried to return fire. "But these people don't fight like anything we have faced before."

Another padawan, Mak Lotor tried to rally his clones to attack, but he was hit in the leg and then the chest and he fell to the ground. Just then Xiss and Wyn were joined by Alpha-17 an ARC clone.

"Mam." Alpha nodded to Wyn. "We can't stay here the enemy has the high ground. We are either going to have to assault their position, or pull back."

Wyn desperately tried to think what she should do. The attack in this sector on the enemy's position had faltered and ground to a halt. Communications had been lost with Sections one and three so she had no way of knowing how the other assault teams were doing. General Krell had been hit in the first wave which had left her in command of the central assault group. If they failed here the whole assault would be put in jeopardy.

"We need air support." Xiss stated.

"Mam coms are down we have no way of contacting command to request for an air strike. Even if we did the enemy AA guns and fighters would knock them out of the sky before they could make their run."

"Do we have ant ATET's left?" Wyn asked.

"We have twoâ€| scratch that we have one left Mam."

"How about TX-130's?"

"We have four left Mam."

"That's enough." Xiss said. "If we hit the now hard and fast with the Sabers, followed up by the ground troops, while the ATTE provides support fire we might have a chance, but if we lose any more vehicles or men we will no longer have the numbers to even attempt it."

"That's what we will do then." Wyn said. "Alpha get the men ready."

"Yes Mam."

Just then there was a shout, Wyn and Xiss looked around their cover to see six figures running towards their lines.

"Sith Spit!" Wyn cursed.

Xiss eyes went wide as she watched the solders methodically take out the clones around them while they blow through their forward perimeter at a dead run. Xiss was furious there was no way she was going to allow only six solders stop their entire assault force. Xiss activated her saber and sprinted towards the enemy.

"Zule don't!" Wyn yelled but it was too late.

****April 20th 2553 16:00 Hours.****

Xiss sat up as the effects of the stun rounds finely wore off, beside her Wyn was also beginning to rise.

"Well that could have gone better." Wyn said as she sat up.

"Hell that was terrible." Xiss groned.

"Next time don't go stumbling straight in to defensive sectors of fire like that." A voice behind them said. "We didn't have to adjust one of our fields of fire."

Wyn and Xiss turned around to find Noble team waiting for them.

"Come on." Carter said "Let's get you all back and debriefed."

12. Chapter 11

****Chapter 11. ****

May 23th 2553 13:00 Hours Mission Briefing Room UNSC **_Hell
Bat**_**. **

I looked around the room at every one present. There were a lot more people here than I was used to working with on a mission. The team that was being sent on this particular mission was made up of me, Six, Jerome-092 a Spartan II that had been assigned to the _Spirit of Fire_ and the leader of red team, Commander Wyn, Commander Lotor, General Leska, an ONI Captain, five ODST, four republic Commandos, and two Astromech droids, one being R2-M4 the droid I had picked up on the damaged Republic ship.

I didn't really like doing these kinds of missions with a big team, but given its importance I guess the higher-ups wanted to be sure.

"Right let's get started Captain Smith said as he stood at the front of the room. "Parker can you please kill the lights."

"Of course Captain, but what did they ever do to you?" The AI said as it appeared on the room's holo projector. She had her hair in a ponytail and wore a form fitting black outfit with a vest and harness and looked as if she was about to go climbing.

"Parker now is not the time." Captain Smith scolded.

"Aw you're no fun." She said as she crossed her arms and looked like she was pouting before she dimmed the lights.

"As a few of you are undoubtedly aware the Covenant has been putting a great deal of pressure on the Republic, has all but taken the charley and delta sectors of the outer rim, and are close to pushing the Republic out of the same mid rim sectors. The Covenant has however not invaded Hutt space. They are in fact in the proses of negotiations with the Hutts as we speak.

Now the primary power holder in Hutt space is Jabba Desilijic Tiure. According to what Intel we have Jabba is strongly agents joining the Covenant and keeping the Hutts neutral in this war and he has gone to grate lengths to do that. However a rival of Jabba's, Oruba is trying to get the Hutt counsel to join the Covenant. In one month there will be a meeting of the Hutt Grand Counsel on Nal Hutta to discuss what they should do; there will also be a representative from the Covenant there as well.

Your team's mission is to go to Nal Hutta and use any method necessary to discredit Oruba and the Covenant.

"What's our insertion plan?" Jerome-092 asked.

"That's where things get interesting." Smith said with a smile. "We have acquired a civilian bulk freighter that your team will be using. It has been out fitted with everything you will need for the mission including stealth insertion pods, hopefully you won't need them."

"Are there any secondary objectives?" The ONI Captain asked.

"You will have a lot of empty space on that ship so if you can acquire any tech it would be appreciated."

"Will we have AI support for this mission?" I asked.

"Yes, Parker will be going with you."

"It will be just like Beta Centauri." Parker said with glee. All I could do was groan, Beta Centauri was not a pleasant memory and Parker had not made it any better.

****May 25th 2553 08:00 Hours **_**Joyrider**_**. ****

I entered the main crew lounge after having done my morning workout and found that some of the team was already there. One of the ODST was curled up in a corner sleeping; one of the Commandos was conversing with another ODST, Six sat at the bar disassembling a blaster, Wyn sat at a game table and was playing a game with Parker and losing by the looks of it, and finely General Leska sat in a corner reading on a data pad. I found it surprising that someone as young as Leska was made a general, but from what I had been told the Republic was desperate for command officers.

"How do you do that?" Wyn demanded of Parker after losing again.

>"I am an AI, I know all the rules and I know every possible move. Plus after our first three games I analyzed your strategies and I can now, with ninety percent accuracy predict your moves."<p>

"Try changing your tactics so you are not as predictable." Leska suggested. "And try to make her think you are doing what you are not."

Just then Jerome walked in. "We should arrive at Nal Hatta in about twelve hours. Six, Five do you two have all your gear set up?"

"Already done Commander" I replied as I tossed him a data pad, but he never caught it. Just then ship shuttered as if something had hit it and we dropped out of hyperspace.

"What the hell." Six cursed as he got up off the floor.

"We just dropped out of Hyperspace." Parker explained. "Some sort of gravitational anomaly, but all I am getting are two ships four hundred clicks out. One is to starboard the other to port. It looks like an ambush."

"Parker raise shields bring weapons systems online, every one suit up." Jerome yelled as he ran out of the room.

"What weapons!" Parker shouted back, before her avatar disappeared and she went to the bridge.

In less than a minute Six and myself were in the Armory and had the three armor assembly units putting on our armor. We could if we had to, take off and put on our armor ourselves, but it took a lot of time and with the Armor assembly units it could be done in thirty seconds.

"_Commander the hostiles have us in a tractor beam, I have weapons online, but they are just point defense, all they are going to do is

annoy them_."

"Sea if you can't go to war with their computers" Jerome ordered. Parker didn't really respond to that she just giggled and I suddenly had a bad feeling. Once we were in our armor and had all our gear we ran back to the lounge to rendezvous with the rest of the team.

"Alright we are all here." Jerome said after counting heads. "General what tactics do pirates in this sector generally employ?"

Leska thought for a moment before replying. "It will be one of two. They will either destroy the ship's crew section, and then come in and take the cargo out of the hold, or they will board and try to take prisoners to sell on the slave market."

Just then the ship was rocked by an explosion. "Parker give me an update." Jerome demanded.

"One of the ships tried to hack me. I captured their viruses then modified it and sent it back to them." she said smiling as she appeared on the holo projector. "They should be knocked out for some time, but his friend didn't like that so he destroyed my communications array." Parker frowned at the last part and looked like she wanted to physically beat the people on the other ship. "By the way the other ship is coming in to dock at the port docking ring."

"Well we know where they are going to be let's go" Jerome ordered as he spun round and headed for the port airlock.

We set up at the lock and prepared to repel borders, Jerome set up a fifty cal and we waited. The hallway wasn't big enough for all of us to engage the borders so we set it up in stages. The first line of defense was Jerome Six and myself, after that came the Jedi, then the ODS, and finally the Commandos. They didn't really like that, but they complied with the order.

Jerome had the idea of opening the air lock before the borders were half way through the blast doors; he hoped it would catch them off guard. It only partially worked; we caught the cutting team and their escorts, but someone had been waiting further back with some sort of concussion weapon, a very powerful concussion weapon. It didn't hurt us, but if we had been out of our armor it probably would have ripped us apart. It was however powerful enough to knock us off our feet and sent us flying back a few feet. Then the borders came, I thought we were goners when they fired their weapons at us, but all they did was fire blue rings that dissipated on our shields. The two lizard looking aliens that had fired the weapons looked at each other like they were confused. That was the last thing they ever did I hit one with a FRAG-8 fin stabilized HE slug from my M90, there wasn't much left of his mid-section. Six got the other with shot to the head from his pistol. Six was using HE round as well, so when it hit it blew the creatures face off.

"_Commander we have a problem." Parker informed Jerome over the com. "The crew of the other ship just launched what I believe to be boarding shuttles_."

"Parker, can you get them with the point defense?"

"_I would if they hadn't taken them out with missiles while you were getting knocked on your ass_."

"All teams fall back. Coordinate with Parker and Captain Dare to stop the incoming borders. Team one will stay here and hold this position." Jerome ordered.

"_Delta this Captain Dare we have borders preparing to breach engineering_." The ONI Captain's voice came over the com instructing the Commandos where to go.

"Finely some action!" The Commando called Scorch shouted joyously.

"_Buck I need your team at the port cargo hold_."

"You know the music, time to dance." Gunnery Sergeant Buck ordered his squad.

"_General Leska I need your team in the starboard hangar bay_."

"Very well we are on our war."

After everything had been arraigned Jerome brought his attention back to the airlock. "I wonder why they haven't sent any more through yet." Jerome commented.

"_Spartans mag boots now_!" Parker yelled over the coms. Just then the air lock door to the pirate's ship slammed closed and the ship began to pull away. The entire section decompressed and we would have been sucked out into space if we hadn't activated our mag boot and set them to full intensity.

"_The Pirates sent an EM pulls into the airlock control, that's why they didn't close when they disengaged their seal_." Parker explained.

"What are they doing now?"

"_They are deploying their boarding shuttles. Commander we can't respond to every place they are going to try and bored_**."**

"Fine we do this the hard way then."

Engineering.

Delta Squad entered engineering just in time to catch the enemy dropping in through the hull breach they had made. They blew away the first two with overwhelming blaster fire, but they were followed by a concussion grenade. The team scrabbled for cover before the grenade went off. Then came the rest of the borders poring through the breach. Scorch popped out of cover and caught a few with an anti-armor round, Sev nailed one in the head, Fixer tossed an EMP grenade, and Boss peppered one with his DC-17m. Just when they thought they might have taken care of every one that had been in the boarding shuttle, a large cylinder dropped through the breach.

"Shit everyone out now!" Boss yelled. Just as they closed the blast

doors there was a loud exposition. The lights in the ship flickered for a moment before they switched to emergency power, the sound of the air scrubbers stopped, and there was a noticeable lack of gravity.

"That's not good!" Fixer said after a moment breaking the silence.

"Gee you think so?" Scorch replied sarcastically.

****Port Cargo Bay.****

Just before the team entered the cargo hold the team of ODST felt the ships gravity give out and the light dim and brighten again as the whet to back up power.

"Well I hope you all remember your null gravity combat training." Buck said to his squad before nodding to the Rooky of the team to open the hatch. Then as the team stood on either side of the open hatch the teams demo expert, Mickey tossed a frag through. After it detonated Dutch and the Rooky went to step through the hatch, but were forced back when a hail of blaster fir came poring through it.

"Crap!" Buck swore. "Parker that cargo hold is empty right?"

"_Yes_."

"Can you open the main doors and vent it to space?"

"_I would have to override one or two safety protocols, but I could do that_."

"Then do it."

"_One momentâ€¦ There it's done_." This ship shook a little as the air in the cargo hold was vented to space and the pirate borders with it.

"_Buck get your team over to the starboard cargo bay_." Captain Dare ordered. "_We just lost contact with Leska's team. Noble Six will meet you there. Don't try anything without him, if they have something that can take out three Jedi than you are going to need his help._"

****Starboard Cargo Bay.****

Leska oriented herself so that she was standing on the bulkhead opposite the cargo hold hatch and then used her legs to propel her through. She was met by a hail of blaster fire but she deflected it with her lightsaber, after her fallowed Wyn and Lotor. They then used the force to alter their flight path and throw off the pirate's fire. Leska passed by one and cut him in half with her saber before twisting and deflecting a pirate's fire back at him. Wyn missed her target, but got him by throwing her lightsaber and then retrieving it with the force. Lotor hit his opponent with a very powerful force push that sent him rocketing across the cargo bay and into a bulkhead before he could use his thrusters to save himself.

Leska had just taken out a second pirate when her senses told her she was in danger. She spun round to confront this new threat just as the stun net hit her.

****Bridge.****

"Captain Dare we have a problem." Parker informed the ONI spook as she appeared on the ship's holo emitter with her arms crossed and a grim look on her face."

"What is it now?" Dare groaned.

"A pirate boarding craft will latch on to the hull just above the bridge about now." Just as she said that the sound of something landing on the hull plating above the bridge was heard.

"Crap!" Was all Dare had time to say before a laser had drilled a hole through the ship's hull and a stun grenade landed at her feet.

****In Route to Bridge.****

"_Lieutenant Alfred do you still have that spar AI chip?" _Parker asked me through the com.

"Yes, butâ€¦"

"_No time the bridge has fallen. Go the console six feet in front of you, and two feet to your right and stand by for my transfer_."

I ran to the console Parker had indicated and placed my hand on it. I cringed as the feeling of being submerged in ice water washed over me.

"Well not much has changed since I was last here." Parker said. "But I think we have bigger problems than your mental state. The pirate boarding craft are leaving and I am tracking Captain Dare's, General Leska's, Commander Wyn's, and Commander Lotor's transponders. They are on two of the shuttles."<p>

"_Every one!_" Jerome shouted over the com. "_To the armory, double time it we have to get off this ship_."

Outside the Pirate vessel retrieved its boarding craft and began pulling away from the crippled freighter. After it had reached a safe distance it charged its primary weapons and blasted the wreck to oblivion.

13. Chapter 12

****Chapter 12****

****May Something 2553 Unknown Time Aboard Unknown Pirate Ship.****

Aubrie woke to find herself in a room that reminded her of a beauty salon on Coruscant. However unlike any beauty salon she had ever seen the patrons were all restrained. She was also startled to find that she was wearing a slave collar and it was blocking her ability to use the force. Aubrie looked to her left and right and found that general

Leska and captain Darr were in the same predicament she was.
>"Ah good your awake!" A blue skinned twi'lek said cheerfully as she entered the room. "My job is so much easier when the merchandise is awake."

"And what if we don't want to cooperate?" Leska asked angrily. She was immediately answered by a powerful shock from her slave collar.
>"That is what will happen." The twi'lek said with a smile. "And if I need to I can turn up the intensity. Now lets get started, the captain wants you all looking your best for market."<p>

Mak Lotor was not having a good day. First he was captured by pirates, then shortly after he came to he was dragged from his cell to another part of the ship and thrown into a makeshift fighting pit and handed a sword. At the other end of the pit was a rather pissed off looking Trandoshan also armed with a sword.

"Okay lessen up, one of you is going to live and one of you is going to die. I really don't care witch I make money on it either way. So you will fight the winner will have the honor of being sold as a gladiator. Now get to it I don't have all day."

Lotor thought about what the pirate had said. As a Jedi he would bring a lot of credits on the slave market, but he would be useless if he refused to fight. On the other hand if the Trandoshan killed him the prate captain could say he had a Jedi slayer and still make a lot of money.

Lotor's thoughts on the subject were brought to an end however when the Trandoshan charged him. Mak pared his attack and made an attack of his own to force the Trandoshan into the defense, but he didn't know if he should kill him or not. As they battled he tried to finger out if he was justified in ending this Trandoshan's life. Sure it was self-defense and the Trandoshan attacked him first, but he was forced to. Then again the Trandoshan had probably killed a lot of people, but that was just racial profiling and he had no proof of that.

Lotor used force push to slam the big liserd it the wall and then readied himself for the Trandoshans counter attack. All the while the question of should he or shouldn't he running through his head. The Trandoshan quickly closed with Lotor again and as they closed Lotor tried something.

"You don't want to fight me!"

The Trandoshan looked at him as if he was mad and Mak dared to hope for a moment that the trick had worked.

"Oh, but I do little Jedi." The Trandoshan hised. "I have been shamed and killing you will go a long way in restoring my standing with the Scorekeeper."

Well that settled it he would have to kill the lizard. Lotor pushed the large reptile off him and assumed his stance. The Trandoshan charged again, Mak sidestepped and slashed the Trandoshan's side and he could see blood begin seeping from the wound. The Trandoshan howled with rage and changed again this time Mak tried a different approach. Will the Trandostan was ready to counter Mak if he sidsteped again. Mak instead rolled forward and brought his sword up and impaled the lizard

****May 26****th**** 2553 03:00 Hours Captured Pirate Ship.****

Just before our ship was turned into galactic space dust we managed to escape using the stealth insertion pods ONI had given us. And after the pirates had left, we used their maneuvering thrusters to get us to the disabled pirate ship. We didn't find any real resistance, most of the crew had abandoned the ship. After we had secured the ship it took Parker another hour to fix all the damage she had done to the ship's computers. That just left us with trying to figure out where the other pirate ship had gone.

"Tell me what I want to know or you will beg for death by the time I am done with you." Six said calmly as he held the commander of the disabled pirate ship by the neck.

>"I would tell him what he wants to know." I said as I leaned against the far wall of our makeshift interrogation room. "My friend here is very good at what he does. The last guy he interrogated wanted to die after only fifteen minutes. Isn't that the one where you removed every one of his internal organs except for his heart and lungs, with just your combat knife?"
"You are all crazy! The pirate commander screamed. Six threw the pirate to the ground and removed his knife from its sheath.

>"That's not what we want to know. I think I'm going to start with your intestines."
"Nal Hutta! They went to Nal Hutta!" The pirate screamed.

>"Well thank you for telling us what we wanted to know." I said as I knelt down and looked him in the face. "However if you lied to us we will have to make you suffer. Why don't you think about that while you sit in the brig."
"Well that was easy." I remarked as Six and I sat down at one of the tables in the ship's galley."

>"Ten minutes, I think that has to be a new record. Nice touch with the organs thing." Six said as he<p>

examined what he had selected for his lunch. "I know Parker said this stuff is okay to eat, but I feel like this was part of something that was shooting at me not all that long ago."

>"Well it tastes okay." I replied as I sampled the alien food. "And we aren't really in a position to be picky."<p>

Meanwhile the ODST and Commandos were eating and swapping stories. I was happy to see they were getting along, though I was surprised how much the one everyone called Rooky slept. While everyone else talked and laughed, he was curled up in a corner sleeping. Just then one of the ODST who was named Dutch called over.

"Spartan with one of us has the better armor, us or these Commandos?" This was an interesting question. Myself and Six both knew the ODST armor well, and I had taken the time to study the Commandos armor when I learned they would be joining us on the mission. The armors were very similar, but the Commandos had energy shielding.

"They have shields." I replied. "That kind of gives them the edge."

"But they need to lose that white paint job, a covenant sniper will see them long before they see you." Six added.

****May 28****th**** 2553 06:00 Hours Nal Hutta Orbit.****

"There they are" Parker said as she pointed to the holographic display of one of the many space stations orbiting Nal Hutta. "Level three subsection four docking B1. Security's pretty tight so you'll have to use a more indirect method to get at them."

"Can you tell if our people have been moved to the station yet?" Jerome asked.
"Give me a moment... The answer to that would be yes it looks like our pirate friends leas a small cargo bay and a few adjacent apartments. Which according to station records they just occupied yesterday. And get this the pirate captain is advertising that he has three Jedi he is putting up for auction tomorrow on the slave market."

"That seems like a bold move." The commando known as Boss remarked. "If you were trying to sell a Jedi on the slave market you wouldn't really want to publicize it."
"Maybe before the Covenant arrived." Six replied. "But the Covenant have cut the Republic off from Hutt space, so it would be very difficult for the Jedi to send a rescue mission even if they found out about it."

"Be that as it may they hold too much information." Jerome said standing up from the command char. "We cannot allow this security breech to continue. If we cannot find a way to recover them soon. Then we will have to fined away to eliminate them."
"Commander we can't just kill our own people." Gunnery Sergeant Buck objected. The Commander just stared at him for a moment through his gold visor making the Gunny fidget a little, having a Spartan star you down through their helmet can be a very nerve racking experience."

"I have had to do it before Gunnery Sergeant." Jerome replied with no emotion in his voice.
"Well we aren't at that point yet." I replied. "Besides I think I have an idea how to get in."

****Ships Armory.****

"This is never going to work." Dutch complained as he tried to put on a piece of light armor.
"Seems like a pretty good plan to me." Buck said as he slipped on a long brown coat."

"Well I don't know about you, but I think this is going to be fun." Micky replied as he examined a par of goggles that he had no clue how to work.
"You would think that." Romeo scoffed. "What do you think Rookie?" Romeo asked as he turned to the newest member of their team, who was currently downing a examining a light helmet."

"Are you boys ready?" Parker inquired as she appeared on the holo pedestal that was in the room, interrupting the ODST's discussion.
"Weil be there shortly." Buck replied as he selected a blaster form a rack on the wall and slid it into the western stile leg holster on his right side."

>Ten minutes later the five ODST and Delta team found themselves standing in the ships primary airlock ready to disembark. Delta were all dressed in different styles of Mandalorian armor, while the ODST looked like they were from the frontier colony's before the war started. Buck wore a pair of gray black boots, gray brown trousers with suspenders, a dark red shirt, a leather leg holster and belt with a blaster pistol, and to finish the outfit a long brown coat that went just past his knees. Dutch's outfit consisted of a pair of brown combat boots, gray cargo pants, a green T-shirt, a light vest of body armor, a bandolier and cartridge belt with a knife on the left side, and a blaster rifle slung over his shoulder. Micky wore a set of hiking boots, tan cargo pants, a white tank top and a blue shirt over that, which he neglected to button, he wore set of tech goggles pushed up on his forehead that he barely knew how to use, and a leg holster with a blaster pistol. Romeo had on a pair of black boots gray slacks, gray shirt, light body armor, a long black coat

over that, and a blaster carbine hung by his side counseled by the black coat. The Rookie wore a pair of combat boots, black cargo pants, a brown leather jacket over a black t-shirt and light armored vest, as well as a light helmet that did more to conceal his face than protect it. For weapons he chose two heavy blaster pistols that he carried in leg holster.<p>

"Okay you all know the plan, Gunnery Sergeant Edwards is posing as the ship's captain the rest of you are his crew." Jerome said as he stood in front of the airlock. "Once you leave here Edwards you will take two of your team and head for the slave markets. In order to get in you will need this. It's a fake ID, your name is Malcolm Reynolds, you were born on Tatooine, and at sixteen you got a job on a freighter, then when you were twenty you became second mate on a smuggling ship for the Hutt cartel. At age twenty-five you acquired this ship the _Dragon's Pearl, _and now your business is acquiring objects of value for high end clients." Jerome looked at the Gunnery Sergeant for a second. "Do you think you can remember all that?"

"I have this Commander." Edwards replied promptly.

"Good! The rest of you, you're on shore leave so try and make it look like it. Just make sure you are in the general vicinity of the slave market for when we might need you. Hopefully we won't need you, but plans always change." Jerome then looked at Six and myself. "You two know what you need to do, is your gear ready?"

"Yes sir." I replied. "Parker and I tested the pregame last night. We can now shut off our shields and rout that power to the cloaking fields. This will keep them active indefinitely, but they were not designed for that so we will have to be careful we don't over load them."

"Understood. Just get in there and get our people out with as little fuss as possible. Rachel and I will be back here with the ship monitoring you all. Now go have some fun."

End
file.